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THE

MONEY-LENDER.

BY

MRS. GORE,

AUTHORESS OF "MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS,"

"THE MAN OF FORTUNE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,

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THE MONEY-LENDER.

CHAPTER I.

Not for this
Was common clay ta'en from the common earth,
Moulded by God, and temper'd with the tears
Of angels, to the perfect shape of man.—TENNYSON.

THE following morning, moved, perhaps, by curiosity to hear as much as was likely to be told by Esther and Salome concerning the Duke di San Catalda without questioning of his own to suggest their communication, Basil, furred to the chin, to meet the nipping blasts of January, (a severe frost having dried the rain of the preceding

evening,) made his way towards South Audley Street. He felt entitled to make early inquiries after the health of Mrs. Verelst.

On reaching the house, however, his title was disputed. As if in anticipation of his visit, the maid-servant who opened the door placed a packet in his hand, and informed him that the young ladies were "out," and Mr. and Mrs. Verelst "engaged." The blood mounted into Basil's cheeks at this announcement. It was the first time he had ever found cause to suppose himself too frequent a visitor, there or elsewhere.

He had not advanced many steps from the door, when it occurred to him that the parcel in his great-coat pocket, which evidently consisted of the volume he had left with Verelst the preceding night, might contain a note of explanation. Proceeding, therefore, to the by-street on the opposite side of the chapel, where he was secure from observation, he opened the packet.

Merely a few cold and dry lines from Verelst!—"I return the book, and regret from my soul that you should have been induced to bring it!" afforded only new grounds for vexation and perplexity.—He had evidently given offence to those whom his whole life was spent in exertions to serve and please; and without having the slightest clue to their grounds for resentment!—

Ere he replaced the volume in his pocket, Basil was moved by an irresistible impulse to re-examine the inscription which had so singularly attracted the attention of the artist's family; and his curiosity thus specifically directed towards it, he saw, beyond all question, that the letters A. O. were inscribed in precisely the same handwriting which had embodied his communications with Abednego Osalez!—

What could be the meaning of this? He remembered the book in his mother's possession as long as he could remember any-

thing!—At what preceding epoch could it have been the property of the Money-lender?—That, having been so, it should have passed into the hands of another, was nothing very wonderful; inasmuch as a person with the covetous propensities of Abednego, was likely to dispose of all or anything belonging to him, for a "con-sideration." But that he should have been a buyer or seller at so early an age, as for a book of his to pass into the possession of the late Lord L——, who, if living, would be eighty years old, appeared unaccountable.

As Basil Annesley replaced the volume in his pocket, strange surmises crossed his brain, to which he would have been ashamed to give a more positive form. He had always entertained a sort of mysterious horror of people of Abednego's nation and calling; and though he would have scornfully rebutted the assertion of another that he mistook his Greek-street friend for the Wandering Jew, involuntarily there recurred to

his mind the sentence of— "*Thou* shalt tarry till I come!"—

"Considering all the friendly advice the old fellow gave me last evening, as we were trudging together in the rain," mused Basil, while pursuing the self-same road he had so recently trodden arm-in-arm with A. O.,—"I am fully entitled to consider him a friend, and treat him as such. I will make the best of my way, therefore, to Greek-street, and ask him, in plain terms, whether the book was ever in his possession. If he should resent my intrusion,—what then? I am not in his power: I have already booked up my interest. He can but give me a gruff answer; and from an oddity like him, a gruff answer is easily endured."

To Greek-street, accordingly, he proceeded, and soon found his way to the well-remembered door.

Alas! huge papers, attached to the centre

panes of the dining-room windows, announced, in printed capitals—

THIS CAPITAL ROOMY MANSION
TO BE LET,
ON A REPAIRING LEASE.
INQUIRE AT 49, DELAHAY STREET,
WESTMINSTER,
Every day from 12 till 2.

"How provoking!" was Basil's involuntary ejaculation, as he stood contemplating the strange contrast of colour between the white paper—to give place to which the panes had been wiped—and the filthy encrustations of the remainder of the windows. As the house, however, appeared quite as uninhabited as now, on his first visit, he determined to make an attempt to enter; nor was it till he had both knocked and rung without effect several times, that he felt convinced of its abandonment by its strange proprietor. Giving up the point in despair, he proceeded on his way, resolved

to visit Delahay-street the following day, at the early hour pointed out by the placard.

He had not proceeded far, however, when a jarring sound, and a sort of yearning curiosity, induced him to turn his head, when he perceived the door of the deserted house slightly opened, and the face of the dirty old woman peeping out.

In a moment, he was back again; and, having caught the eye of the grim porteress, it was impossible for her to shut the door in his face.

"Is your master at home?" said he.

"Nobody lives here now but *me*," grumbled the old woman. "'T isn't no fault of mine if I didn't answer the door. The owner of the house don't choose to pay taxes for it no more till it's let, and only lets me live here, on condition that I answer no knocks or rings, and don't let myself be seen by the neighbours."

"Mr. Osalez, then, is *really* not at home?" inquired Basil.

The old woman contracted her brows, as if for an effort of comprehension; then drew back the dirty flap of her cap, and screwed her left eye, like a person hard of hearing.

"I inquired whether Mr. Osalez were at home?"

"A. O.'s to be spoke with at No. 49, Delahay-street, Westminster," she repeated, either not knowing, or not choosing to know, the proprietor of the uninhabited house by any other designation. "I would not say as much to a stranger; but I knows you has *had* dealings with him afore, and so I don't mind."

Basil Annesley pointed to the notice in the window, as sparing him all necessity for especial gratitude for her communication, and wished her good morning.

As he made his way towards St. James's-street, in a very different mood from that in which, three weeks before, he had pursued the same track, he could not but revert, with unspeakable irritation of mind, to his

repulse at the door of the Verelsts. Never before had he felt so desirous of an interview with Esther. He wanted to inquire the meaning of the artist's letter. He wanted to inquire the nature and standing of their intimacy with the Sicilian Duke. He wanted to tell her that he had never seen her look so lovely—never heard her sing so sweetly, as the preceding night; and he desired this all the more, from feeling certain, in his heart of hearts, that, unimportant as such an attestation might appear to other ears, his approval was essential to the happiness of his own dear, timid Esther.

Like most men of his age, when passionately in love, Basil Annesley found little enjoyment, in either pleasure or business, with which the object of his affections had not some remote connexion. In spite, therefore, of his intentions of proceeding straight from Greek-street to his club, he found himself, in less than an hour afterwards, at Storey's-gate, contemplating the

narrow opening to Delahay-street, and as much cheered in spirits as is usually the result of a stirring walk in frosty weather.

He was now sufficiently acquainted with the eccentric habits of the Money-lender to perceive, without surprise, that the house to which he had been referred was just as dilapidated of aspect as the one he had just quitted. It was clear enough that the numerous temporary residences of Abednego consisted of old houses, which he bought up on speculation, and inhabited, till a favourable opportunity presented itself of getting them off his hands; and the mansion in Delahay-street, still more "roomy" than the "capital" one abandoned by the Money-lender in Soho, was, to all appearance, still gloomier and more ruinous. It was of red brick, having five windows in front, with a pretence at pilasters between; the said pilasters being also of brick, with capitals of carved wood-work supporting a heavy cornice—of which the object was doubtful,

unless it purported to assist in weighing down the frontage of the attic story, to which it was appended, and the peaked, ill-tiled roofing above.

"Truly, an appropriate den for the strange old fellow!" murmured Basil, as he approached the door, to which, contrary to the usage of London houses, it was necessary to descend a step from the street—finished, probably, after the completion of the house, which retained a sort of manorial air of antiquity among its modernized neighbours. He felt almost ashamed of presenting himself, in broad daylight, as a visitor, at a door which, he little doubted, was recognised by the neighbourhood as the den of a money-lending Jew.

In order to excite as little notice as possible, he contented himself with a modest ring at the bell; and so leisurely were the movements of those appointed to answer the summons, that he had time to notice a sort of damp vault-like emanation from the area,

which not even the frostiness of the atmosphere could overcome. So stagnant was the air brooding over the flagstones encrusted in mounds with green moss (now hoary in patches with rime), that it seemed as though any person descending into that deserted area would have been as much in danger of asphyxiation, as in some mephitic well.

At length, the door creaked, or rather growled on its hinges; and a starveling of a boy appeared—the redundant growth of whose shock of hair was perhaps destined to replace a general scarcity of habiliments; his outer garments being sufficiently ragged to shew that nothing in the way of shirt interposed between them and his sallow skin.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Osalez," said Basil.

The urchin stared, but made no reply.

"I was referred to this house," persisted Basil, more and more ashamed of himself

and his errand, — "from Greek Street, Soho."

"You're after hours!"—said the boy, preparing to shut the door in his face.

"I know it," said Basil, placing his foot so resolutely on the threshold, as to render the attempt impossible; and at the same moment insinuating a coin into the hand of the boy, which, though sufficiently insignificant to have been flung contemptuously on the pavement by the door-opener of any other house in the street, was so much the most important ever clenched in the palm of the ragged page of the Money-lender, that he stood staring in stupid wonderment, instead of either persisting in excluding, or expressing his gratitude to the intruder.

"Are *you* Mr. Osalez's servant?" inquired Annesley, scarcely able to refrain from a smile.

"I'm Bill that sweeps the George Street crossing," replied the boy, tugging the

longest of the elf-locks overhanging his forehead, in token of gratitude to his benefactor. "I runs of errands for the old gentleman, and opens the door from noon till two. Only to-day I stayed later, to light a fire and set on the kettle, 'cos the old gentleman's poorly."

"He *is* at home, then ?—Be so good as to carry up this card, and say I am waiting to speak to him,"—said Annesley.

Thus certified of the claims and good intentions of the visitor, the boy invited him into the hall, while he proceeded to do his errand; and while the little sweeper, leaving his heavy shoes at the bottom of the square creaking staircase, shuffled up stairs, Basil stood contemplating the dark but roomy hall, paved with black and white marble, which, by dirt and friction, had now degenerated into gray and yellow; besides being cracked in many of the lozenge-shaped squares, and in others, sunk into the flooring. In the angle formed by the dingy

staircase, stood an old sedan chair, dropping into decay and covered with mildew, yet still retaining in its gilt mouldings tokens of aristocratic emblazonment.

Shuddering with cold, and the depression produced by the gloom of a spot into which the daylight of that narrow street struggled imperfectly through the half-shuttered windows, Basil waited impatiently till the barefooted boy shuffled down again.

"Master 'll see you,—you may walk up!"—said Bill, pointing upwards with his thumb, while resuming his shoes; having done which, he disappeared towards the basement floor, leaving Basil to find his way unescorted to the presence of Abednego Osalez.

Concluding that he had only to follow the custom of morning visits, and enter the drawing-room, Basil walked leisurely up and opened the door that presented itself on the first landing. But with all his cognizance of the peculiarities of his host, he

was not prepared for the scene that presented itself within.

The drawing-rooms of which he had opened the door, though low, and rendered apparently lower, as in many old-fashioned houses, by a ceiling overlaid with ornaments and divided into compartments by beams of carved wood-work, were unusually spacious. Yet spacious as they were, not an alley presented itself by which Basil could penetrate into the interior, without the certainty of covering himself with dust and cobwebs, by collision with the heterogeneous objects crowded into the area;—pieces of antiquated furniture, articles of *virtù*, besides a variety of undefinable and indescribable things, which looked as if assembled together by a hasty removal in a fire or the sacking of a town, thirty years before, and abandoned ever since to the dust-gathering and smoke-gathering operations of Time.

Heaped on the floor, in one corner of the room, like potatoes in a barn or beans in a

granary, lay the contents of a library; from their rich old bindings apparently valuable, but overgrown with dust and mould, like the bricks of some ruined pile. To the left of the door, on entering, stood a fine marble copy of the *Venus de Medicis*, which the prudery of the spiders had covered with draperies of black cobwebs, that hung like draperies down to the very pedestals.

Further on, was the Whetter, in bronze, on whose dark surface, on the contrary, the coating of dust, in ledges, assumed a lighter colour; and beyond, in all directions, were slabs of *pietra dura* slanting against rich consoles of carved ebony, and bas-reliefs in *rosso antico* and other precious marbles, side by side with tawdry French clocks, Dresden cups, and Nankin vases; groupings of stuffed birds, which, by the fracture of their glass-cases, and the admission of the atmosphere, had sacrificed their bright plumage to the moths; so that only the shrunken skin, skeleton stuffed with straw, and staring

glass eyes, remained perceptible, in ghastly mockery of the skill of the naturalist!

Crystal girandoles stood on the consoles, so encrusted with dust as to have lost all symptom of transparency; while of a magnificent copy of Correggio's Notte, that stood frameless against a japan cabinet, the rats had gnawn off a corner!—There was a species of altar with folding wings, such as are used for the travelling devotions of crowned or mitred heads, adorned with chasings, the work of Cellini or one of his pupils, which, though evidently of silver, was tarnished to the tint of bronze!—

Never before had Basil Annesley contemplated so singular a waste of property!—But that these precious objects were intermingled with trays of old iron, rolls of lead, and fragments of packing-cases, he would have compared this singular museum to the *bric-à-brac* shops he had visited on the Quai Voltaire at Paris, or in the Juden Gasse at Frankfort; saving that, in these,

though the chaos of valuable works of art was quite as confused, the strictest cleanliness was observed to preserve the component objects from injury or disregard.

After a deliberate survey of the room, a glance at the coating of dust through which the colouring of a parqueted floor, now so rare in London, was faintly perceptible, convinced him that, for some time past, no foot but his own had crossed the threshold, and that he must pursue his search elsewhere after the proprietor of the extraordinary treasury he had thus invaded.

Closing the door carefully after him, he ascended another flight of stairs, and again opened the first door facing the landing. But the result on this occasion was nearly the same as on the first, with the exception that the warehouse of curiosities on the second floor appeared exclusively devoted to the reception of pictures.

"My friend the Jew has evidently a taste for lodging as near as possible to the sky!"—

thought Basil, proceeding to the attic story; and as he noticed the increase of light and decrease of density in the humid atmosphere while continuing to ascend, he came to a conclusion, that, were *he* a lodger in the old house in Delahay Street, he should follow the example of its proprietor.

The door that now faced him on the landing was slightly ajar, as if purposely left so by the ragged page, by way of indication. Basil tapped lightly, to warn the inmate of his approach, and a hoarse whisper instantly bade him "Come in."

Before a smoking fire, composed of small coal and shavings, the crazy grate containing which emitted the stifling effluvia peculiar to rusty iron, in an old-fashioned *bergère* covered with the ragged remains of a rich brocade, (which, in the days of Queen Anne and of the Sedan-chair below, had probably supported the graceful limbs of many a court beauty,) sat the Money-lender—enrobed in a faded but magnificent wrapper of velvet

and sables, and with his strongly-marked features and picturesque costume, looking as though he had been sitting for his picture to Rembrandt.

"I am afraid your wet walk has had a worse influence on *you* than on myself, Sir?" said Basil, struck by the hoarseness of the tones in which the old man attempted to inquire his business.

"A slight sore throat,—nothing more!"—grumbled Abednego; "easily cured with a quarter of an ounce of gum-arabic and a pint of hot water; half the price of a hackney-coach fare!—What do you want with me?"—

"So little," replied Basil Annesley, seating himself on a rickety straw chair opposite the invalid, "that I would by no means have troubled you had I imagined you were indisposed."—

"Then why did you come at all?"—demanded the Money-lender, with surly abruptness.

"I came to ask you an idle question. You were in such perfect health and spirits when we parted yesterday evening, that I had no expectation of being so much an intruder as I find myself to-day.—I have been as far as Greek Street in search of you."

"Do *you* want to take the old house on a repairing lease?"—inquired Abednego, with a sneer. "You imagine, perhaps, that some of the money-bags of A. O. will be overlooked in the old cupboards and odd corners?"—

"I have no views on your money-bags, Mr. Osalez, excepting such as you have found me very frank in declaring,"—replied Annesley, with a degree of steadiness that did him no disservice with one accustomed to be addressed in terms of abject subservience.

"Your question, then, I am to conclude, simply regarded the state of my health?"—retorted the Money-lender, the wrinkles

which had puckered the corners of his keen eyes into a sarcastic expression, gradually relaxing.

"Still less!—I never saw a person more robust than my companion of last night.—I merely wished to ask whether you could give me any information concerning a volume in my possession, which bears on the title page your initials, inscribed in your own hand-writing."

"I should be somewhat puzzled, I fancy," replied Abednego, with a hoarse chuckle, "to give you precise information concerning all the varieties of property which, one way or other, have passed through my hands! I buy whatever I can buy cheap, and sell it whenever I can sell it dear! The fools *from* whom I purchase, or who purchase from *me*, are of no more account in my eyes than one of the atoms of dust which your coat has imbibed by your recent visit to my lumber-rooms!"

Following the indication of the old man's

skinny finger, pointed towards him, Basil perceived that his scrupulously neat dress bore unsatisfactory traces of the filmy drapery of the Venus de Medicis.

"With such feelings," resumed Abednego, on perceiving that his young visitor evinced no fastidious tokens of disgust at the misadventure which had befallen him, "I do not often set my mark on those temporary belongings. Any book in which I ever inscribed my initials, must have been a book I valued!"—

"You can scarcely have failed to value a work so interesting as *this!*"—replied Basil, drawing from his pocket the volume he had brought from Barlingham, for the amusement of Verelst, and placing it before Abednego, so as to bring the inscription under his eyes.

To his utter surprise, the effect produced on Osalez by the sight, was scarcely less remarkable than that which it had wrought

in the mother of Esther!—The old man fell back in his chair, and for a moment appeared to gasp for breath; while Basil sat watching him with uneasy consternation.

"That boy takes as long to boil my hot water, as a chemist to compound a medicine!"—were the first words that burst from the quivering lips of Abednego, as if in apology for his emotion;—"yet I told him I was choking with my sore throat!"—

"Will you give me leave to ring, Sir?" said Basil, perceiving that his singular host was desirous of evading his observation.

"I give you leave to find a bell,—if you are able!"—retorted the old man, as though priding himself on the denuded condition of his habitation. "No, no!—*no* bells here, my fine captain, nor menials to answer them!—No knaves in showy liveries, like those who held the great-coat on your back for you, last night, at my Lady Maitland's, who have received no wages save their pickings,

stealings, and perquisites, these two years past!—If there were indeed such a thing in this old house as an unbroken bell-wire, it would serve only to frighten the poor rats, who are as much masters here as myself.—I have no servant, except the beggar-boy who showed you in."

"And do you consider such an unprotected state safe, Sir, with such an amount of property in the house?"—inquired Basil, wishing to give him time to recover his first surprise ere he renewed his inquiries.

"The half-starved terrier I let loose at night, is a better guard than a company of the household brigade!"—replied Abednego; who had thrust the volume aside on the table, as if not choosing to encounter a second view.

"But even if the dog gave the alarm,—in your infirm state——"

"This is the first day's illness I have had these twenty years; and you may perceive that I am prepared to take care of myself,"

interrupted the old man, suddenly opening the drawer of the table, beside him, and taking out a brace of pistols, on half cock, which he quietly replaced,—having evidently exhibited them to reassure, not to intimidate his guest.

"Besides, the police have their eye on my house. I have *them* in fee, as I have the insurance offices,—as a matter of business."

"But the discreditable urchin who waits upon you——"

"Regards me as little better than a beggar! Where a half-starved brat sees an empty larder, he beholds only misery and want. The *chef d'œuvres* you saw just now in my drawing-room, have less intrinsic value in *his* eyes, than a sirloin of beef in an eating-house window.—Bill the sweeper pities me, Sir,—pities me, as a poor old man, almost as much a pauper as himself!"—

"He may some day come into contact with people able to enlighten him," observed Basil, gravely. "May I ask, Sir, whether you have any recollection of the book beside you?"—

"You got it from your mother!"—said Abednego, as if started into the rejoinder.

"You sold it to her, then?"—demanded Basil, anxious to account for his knowledge of the fact. But at the word, Abednego half started from his chair, as if smitten with a sore and sudden pain. In a moment, however, he recovered himself.

"Nay,—I only so concluded by force of inference," said he. "A taste for the works of Holbein and Hollar appeared more appropriate to an accomplished woman than to a gay guardsman.—Perhaps you wish to dispose of the book?"

"I am not, thank God, so straitened, even by the imprudences which have rendered me your debtor!" said Basil, proudly,

"as to be driven to the sale of my mother's property,—or even of property derived from her.—I merely wished to account to myself for the inscription of your initials on the title-page."—

"The initials of A. O. have, I admit, obtained strange notoriety by my means," said Abednego; "nevertheless, you cannot suppose me to be the only individual who bears them, or has ever borne them?"—

"Scarcely!" replied young Annesley. "But these letters are distinctly of your own tracing!"

"Are you so expert in handwritings as to swear to that?"—demanded Abednego; abstaining, however, from a glance towards the book again officiously placed before him by Basil.—"My dear young friend—take my advice, and neither perplex your brains with surmises on subjects that little concern you, nor by inferences arising out of idle coincidences, which the inexperience of boy-

hood conceives to be pregnant with meaning. You are surprised, for instance, that I am tolerably well acquainted with your movements, and the movements of people so much out of my sphere of life as Lord Maitland's wife.—A moment's reflection ought to convince you, that a portion of the Money-lender's business is to obtain the most accurate information concerning the spendthrifts of the day,—already his debtors, or his debtors likely to become.—I look upon all such as constituting my flocks and herds; —as much my property as the physician regards the gouty lord lolling past him in his chariot; or the undertaker, the hectic wretch he hears coughing at the street corner!"—

"It may be your business to seek such information—the wonder lies in your obtaining it!" observed Basil.

"*All* information may be had for money!" rejoined Abednego, rubbing his lean hands with an air of exultation.—"*Everything*

is to be had for money—if applied with the same intelligence that gathered it together. —Look at me, Mr. Annesley!—Did you ever see a more loathsome scarecrow?"

And as he spoke, the Jew raised from his head the Greek cap, embroidered with tarnished gold lace, by which its bald crown was covered, as if to give greater expansion to his ugliness.

"Ay, smile, Sir!—You are too civil to confirm the ungracious verdict of a man who sees himself as he sees all things else in this world—in the clear and searching light of truth!—But I tell you that, unsightly as I am, women, both young and fair, cajole me with their courtesies:—I would say, caresses, but that you must be an eye-witness of the fact, to have faith for disproportion so monstrous!—Look ye here!—this tawdry thing," —said he, pointing to the cap, which he now replaced upon his head,—"was worked for me by the white hands of a countess; and if

I chose it, she is ready to embroider a dozen such,—nay, to place them with her aristocratic fingers upon the gray head of the old Money-lender!"—

"For which subjection to your will, you despise her!"—said Basil, with indignation.

"I despise her, because the necessities that bring her cringing to my feet, arise from the wantonness of folly,—nay, the wantonness of *crime;*—for, in a wife and mother, folly becomes criminal as vice! This woman must shine, forsooth, and glitter, and dazzle, by the splendour of her entertainments, and fashion of her dress.—Why?—Because she is *proud;*—because she has the ambition of being cited for her distinction of looks and manners!—And what is the result of her pride and her distinction?—Even that she is made to crawl in all the indigence of extravagance, to the knees of A. O., the Money-lender, and beg him, with tears in her eyes and prayers upon her lips,—nay, more than prayers, if

I were brute enough to profit by her subjection,—to take pity upon her necessities. You doubt this!—Read, read!—It may be treachery for a lover to exhibit the letters of a fond and trusting woman—it is none for the Money-lender to betray the correspondence of a thriftless customer!"—

And, snatching a pen from the old leaden inkstand beside him, and passing it hastily through the signature of a letter, which, while speaking, he had taken from an envelope lying on the table, he presented it to Basil.

"Remark the countess's coronet on the seal," said he, "and admire the delicacy of the handwriting, and elegance of the paper, in confirmation of my assertion, ere you peruse the abject pleadings of this fashionable bankrupt!"

Basil Annesley shuddered as he read; for every line and every syllable adduced horrible confirmation of Abednego's assertions.

"You knew not half the advantages of

my calling!"—cried the old man, laughing with feeble triumph at the air of consternation that overspread the countenance of Basil, under the influence of one of those painful discoveries which tend to shake our confidence in human nature. "Till now, you regarded the old beggar of Paulet Street as the crazy proprietor of a warehouseful of worm-eaten curiosities, left in deposit by his customers,—of a few crazy houses,—and perhaps a few floating thousands lent out on infamous usury. Ha!—ha!—ha!—ha!—You would give worlds, boy,—*worlds*, for a thousandth part of my influence and authority!—Preferment and promotion lie in the bureau of the Money-lender!—I command most of those who command the destinies of the kingdom.—I have princes, ministers, bishops, among my debtors; your highflying orator, your rhapsodizing author; —fellows who, upon the hustings, or in the House, or at Exeter Hall, get up and speechify upon virtue, honour, honesty: but

whose shallow consciences are not the less admeasurable by certain shreds of parchment, called bonds, which I hold in my possession!—There are few things they dare refuse me: and even as war-making kings tremble under the governance of Rothschild, under *mine*,—under the control of A. O. shivering in his garret,—abide more than one, two, or three of those to whom you uncover your head reverentially as you pass!—You saw me keep the Duke of Rochester dancing attendance at my gate? —As much, and more also, have I done to men having the blood-royal of England in their veins!"

The spirits of Basil were overpowered by the vehemence of excitement gradually enkindled in the old man's frame by the progress of discussion. He almost feared that Abednego must be under the influence of fever, to become thus strangely communicative.

"Open yonder bureau," said the Money-

lender, extending his skinny finger to one clamped with iron, which stood beside the wretched pallet that formed his comfortless bed.

And Basil almost mechanically obeying, beheld within, in separate compartments, piles of rouleaus, such as he had already seen in the secretaire in Greek Street, besides a variety of morocco-cases.

"Bring me a handful of those baubles,—or, stay!—you know not the ways of the place," he continued, tottering from his chair, till he stood beside Annesley, leaning on the bureau, of which he opened a secret drawer. "Look here!—these are a duchess's diamonds.—I hold them in pledge while *she* appears at the right hand of the throne, in false trinkets of paste!—These sapphires are the property of a banker's wife, who pretends to have grown '*serious*,' as a pretence for abjuring the use of jewels;—because, deceitful jade! her own are in the keeping of A. O.!—But this—*this* is my

crown of glory!" chuckled the Money-lender, bringing forth a small round case, containing a bracelet of brilliants. "Do you see this miniature? — Six years only have elapsed, since the proud and happy young lord it represents, placed it on the arm of his lovely bride!—He has been three years in his grave,—and the miniature is mine!— The tinsel of fashion by which the widow is trying to bewilder another silly victim into wedlock is procured with means of my supplying. But she broke the heart of her first husband by her extravagance. It may not be easy to find another ready to be heart-broken."

"Surely you had better rest yourself again, Sir, in your easy-chair," said Annesley, eager to avoid these hateful revelations. —"Pardon me, if I own that I am by no means anxious to see the veil uplifted from the deformities and defeatures of my fellow-creatures."

"I have, nevertheless, too deep a stake

in your well-doing, not to afford you the means of discriminating between the sheep of the flock, and the wolves in sheep's clothing," said the Money-lender, as he doubly locked the bureau, and retreated to his seat. "Admit," said he, gathering more closely around him the robing of his furred symar, (which might have served a theatrical Doge of Venice, or Grand Pensionary of Holland,) —"admit that, if I choose to deny myself the daintiness of being drugged by a fashionable apothecary, and dawdled over by a canting housekeeper, it is not for want of means to keep such reptiles in my pay?"

"Which makes me only the more regret, Sir, your obstinate discomfort," replied Basil, beginning to survey the squalid wretchedness of the millionary, as the crotchet of a maniac. "You are ill—*more* ill, perhaps, than you imagine; and left here all night alone, (for even the boy, I conclude, quits you at night,) alone, with the gnawing of the rats for companionship—to fight against

fever and suffocation—you may have cause to repent your rejection of the means of care and comfort, secured you by your ample fortune."—

"I have been left alone with worse things than gnawing rats—even with my own bitter and gnawing thoughts, and yet struggled through the trial," said Abednego. "You pity me, young man, for risking to be stifled by a quinsy, when I might hire some frowsy old woman to sit up with me, whose gripe upon my throat at midnight, were a worse peril than my disease!—Basil! had you ever experienced the heart choking that suspends the impulses of life, under a sense of the contumely of those you love—had you ever felt the fever that throbs in the burning veins, when disparaged by the idol of your tenderness—the woman for whom you would have perilled every hope of your soul, in this world, and the world to come—had you seen the fools, the knaves, whom you despise with the full force of your vigorous

intellect—the warm fervour of your generous heart, triumphing over your defeat, and asking how you presume to form pretensions to the smiles of beauty—you—*you* with nothing to recommend you but the possession of youth, ardour, mind, cultivation, honour, truth—and treble the earthly enjoyments of the lordly home from which you desire to remove her to the temple of wedded love where you would have served her as a slave;—had you known all this, Basil Annesley—had you felt those contemptuous looks eating like caustic into your flesh—had you heard those insulting words piercing like poisoned arrows into the marrow of your bones—you would have been content to live as I do, apart from the titled herd, apart from the rapacious crew, despising alike the hirelings for bread, and the hirelings for vanity;—alone, independent, —brooding over the sense of a mighty wrong, and anticipating the triumph of a mighty revenge!"—

"All this I could perfectly understand," replied young Annesley, steeling himself against the awe with which he was beginning to listen to what appeared to be the rhapsodies of a lunatic—"provided your privation tended towards the accomplishment of aught beyond your personal inconvenience. But what enemy of yours will be the worse for your remaining this bitter night destitute of attendance and medicaments?"—

"They will be the worse for the results of a system of which these hardships form a part!" replied Abednego, in a gruffer voice, as if exhausted by his recent outburst. "I discern, by the growing superiority of your glance, young man, the contempt kindling in your soul towards my short-sightedness! —You recal to yourself the words of the Psalmist: 'He heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them!' *I* know—*I* know, Basil Annesley—and I glory in knowing! He who gathers them will shed

coals of fire upon those who—But no matter! What care *you* for the burning injuries or burning revenge of the old Money-lender?"—

"I shall care much more, Sir, to know that you are lying here devoid of the necessaries of life, while *my* pillow has been smoothed by your kindness," replied Basil, mildly; "but I cannot offer you my aid. I cannot *now* ask you to accept the services of a faithful servant of my own; because, in the instance of others, you have shewn me that you consider such acts of kindness to be interested and mercenary."

"Not from one so young and guileless as *you!*" burst in a hoarse murmur from the parched lips of Abednego. "Be satisfied!—It would make me far more uncomfortable to have my poor old dwelling ransacked by the curiosity of strangers, than to lie here conscious that the javelin of death is at my breast, and that there is none to close my eyes if the Grim One gets the best of it!—I

want no prying Jacks to spy out the nakedness of the land, or into its abundance; to exult over my empty cellar, or covet my brimming coffers. There is less peril, Basil Annesley, in the quinsy which, as you perceive, is gradually thickening my voice and filming my eyes, than in the malice of the cut-throats with whom your rascal in livery might league himself, on the temptation of the wealth that lies ensconced in this old seeming rat-hole, richer of contents than the palace of Aladdin! But you pretend a desire to do me a service," said he, half-interrogatively.

Annesley answered not a word; and the Money-lender was forced to reiterate his question.

"I *pretend* nothing," replied Basil, coldly, —"I pity your infatuation—I pity your abandonment; and would fain induce you to take pity on yourself!"—

"I repeat that you just now tendered me offers of service. If sincere, and your good-

will be not a mere pretence, confer an obligation on me by giving me this volume!" said Abednego, striking his bony hand on the copy of Hollar, lying on the table.

"I cannot do *that!*" replied Basil, in a decided tone; "for it is not mine to give.—It is the property of my mother!"

The piercing glance of Abednego peered from under his bushy eyebrows, and fixed itself scrutinizingly on his face.

"How comes it, then, in your possession?" said he.

"I arrived yesterday morning from Barlingham Grange, where she resides," replied Annesley, firmly, "and brought it with me."

"Without her knowledge?"

"Without her knowledge!" replied the young man, in a less assured voice. But the admission appeared less to provoke the contempt than the satisfaction of his singular companion.—A ray of joy twinkled in his deep-set eyes.

"And what *tempted* you to bring it with

you?"—inquired Abednego, with persevering curiosity.

"I wished to shew it to a friend, to whom, as a curious work of art, I thought the sight might be advantageous," replied the harassed guest.

"That is, you wanted to conciliate the blind old father of Esther Verelst!"—added the Money-lender, while the colour mounted to the temples of the astonished Basil.

"Do you mean me to believe you in league with Satan, as well as the comptroller of half the destinies of London?"—cried he, losing all self-possession.

Abednego laughed aloud at this apostrophe; and the huskiness of his voice was now painful to hear.

"You go far out of your way, young Sir," said he, "to account for my participation in the household secrets of a needy artist!—Is it so *very* marvellous that I—A. O. the Money-lender—should be aware that the sum of money you raised so rashly at my

hands, was devoted to meet acceptances which had their origin in the embarrassments of that wrong-headed ass—Verelst, the painter?"—

Basil Annesley now fairly started from his seat.

"Somewhat an onerous requital," persisted Abednego, with a sneer, "for a few cups of lindenwater, bestowed upon you during your illness at Heidelberg, and a few lessons in crayons!"—

"Mr. Osalez!"—Basil was beginning,—but Abednego persevered in a louder key —"You fancy," he continued, "that it would go to the stubborn heart of Lady Annesley, to know that a book of hers had fallen into the hands of an obscure, money-lending, miserly, contemned, and outcast Jew! But I tell you, young gentleman, that, haughty as she is, her blood would rise to fever-heat, did she know that her only son—the son of her pride, if not of her affection—had pledged his heart, and medi-

tated pledging his hand, to the daughter of a starving artist, and the grand-daughter of ——But no matter!—*Her* scorn and her humiliation are no affairs of mine!—But here comes my brew of diet-drink!" cried he, as the dirty urchin, carrying a jug of hot water, peeped into the room: "and the more welcome, that my throat is parched with talking.—So no more to-day, Mr. Annesley!—Untempting as my bed may look to *you*, I am cowardly enough to feel that my old bones will be the better for it.—Farewell!—If you have consistency enough, to care two days hence for the ailment that paints such compassion in your looks at this moment, pr'ythee come and see whether death or A. O. have fought the better fight! —Till then, surely, you will entrust to my hands a volume so replete with instruction as this?" said he, again laying his hand upon the book, which Annesley had no pretext for refusing as a loan.

Almost before he knew what he was

about, he had been unconsciously dismissed by the Money-lender; and was standing on the pavement of Delahay Street—listening to the bolting, and barring, and putting up of the rusty chain within, by Bill the sweeper!—

Basil had not resisted Abednego's commands, that the boy should follow him down to open the door; for he thus secured an opportunity to enforce, by a second bribe, his charge to the uncouth page on no account to leave the invalid that night; but to be in readiness to receive the medicines and instructions he was proceeding to despatch from the shop of a neighbouring chemist.

CHAPTER II.

Thou shak'st, old man! Are thy limbs palsied?—No.
'Tis not old age,—'tis not disease,—'tis not
Inclemency of cold thus troubles thee!—
It is the ague of a tortured heart,
That not e'en time can med'cine!—MASSINGER.

NEVER had Basil Annesley installed himself before the fire of his lodgings in so desponding a mood as after his interview with Abednego.—Not a single point or person whereon he could fix his thoughts with complacency, by way of relief?—After a visit to his mother, in which he had been made to feel himself an unwelcome guest,—after becoming an ear-witness to the ravings of

the old gardener, which he would have given worlds to efface from his memory,—he had been spurned from the door which he had a right to approach as a benefactor, and where he would nevertheless have been proud to kneel in all the self-sacrificing humility of love!—

His mother he knew to be exposed to the most harassing and painful duties.—The family of Verelst appeared to be distracted by some peculiar contrariety of fortune, of which he was unable to surmise the origin. And now, his benefactor, the man for whom, involuntarily, he entertained at once the greatest interest and greatest contempt, was suffering from a dangerous disease.—In neither of the three cases could he exercise a beneficial influence. Gladly would he have dedicated all the means at his command, to alleviate the pangs of any of the three. But he was powerless as a child.—All he could do was to sympathize in silence, and at a distance.—

To say that no floating visions of the Duca di San Catalda mingled with his many vexations, would be disingenuous. It was doubtless no small enhancement to the miseries of his position that, while excluded from the house of Verelst, he believed another to be favoured with access;—another, rich, great, powerful,—able to confer favours fifty times greater than the poor services he had rendered, and perhaps to make them acceptable by graces of deportment, in which he felt himself to be lamentably deficient. In the depths of his reverie, poor Basil seemed to behold passing before him, as in a dream, all that was occurring at Barlingham,—all that was chancing in the drawing-room of Verelst,—all that was exercising a fatal empire in the miserable attic of A. O.!—

So irritated was his mind by these perplexities, that he felt unequal to the exertion of dining at mess; and he accordingly determined to take an early dinner at the

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Clarendon, and proceed to the play;—the resource of homeless men in London against the publicity of their Club or loneliness of their lodgings.

Now the play, in the month of January, is as habitual a resort of fashionable loungers as it is secure from their presence the moment the season commences. Scarcely had Basil taken a back seat in one of the public boxes, leaning back with folded arms, for the unmolested enjoyment of his reflections, when an unusual degree of movement and conversation in one of the private boxes attracted his notice, and he perceived that it was tenanted by a party of his brother officers,—Loftus, Blencowe, and Maitland, the old boy Carrington, and the young boy Wilberton,—precisely those whom others would have designated as his "friends."—

This was vexatious; for Loftus had invited him to dine with them and join a party to the Adelphi, and they would now perceive that the engagement he had pleaded,

was a mere subterfuge to avoid them; for he rightly conjectured that the unusual vociferation in their box was produced by their discovery of his entrance, and ejaculations of indignation at his desertion.

He was, consequently, as little at his ease at the theatre, as he would have been at home. To his disturbed thoughts, the eyes of the merry party seemed to be constantly upon him. He fancied them still pursuing the system of quizzing which had irritated him the preceding night into the unlucky explanation, the full force of embarrassments arising from which had been demonstrated to him by the officiousness of Carrington, on his way from Arlington Street to the Club.

It was, perhaps, because annoyed by the sort of Inquisition to which he felt himself exposed,—(for the laughers had the advantage over him in point both of position and numbers,)—that, the moment the curtain dropped upon a tragedy composed of

glazed calico, gilt paper, glass beads, cotton velvet, twelve flourishes of trumpets, a voice more uproarious in offering "a kingdom for a horse" than all the twelve put together, and a prompter still louder and more active than both the trumpets and tragedian,—Basil quitted the theatre. He foresaw that the significant smiles and whisperings they had directed towards him during the courtship of Lady Anne and the mild heroism of Richmond, would have double scope during the tumults of the pantomime.

It was a chilly night: the moonlight lay like snow upon the frozen pavement; and that vivid brightness which, in summer, seems intended to facilitate happier enjoyment than the glare of day, either for the revellers of this world, or those which, unseen and unsuspected, disport themselves impalpably around us, seemed lost and thrown away on a state of atmosphere that drove both man and beast to shelter. There was nothing to tempt forth fay or fairy,—

the sylph to the moonbeam, the undine to the wave. A few shivering mortals crept along the streets despairing,—or, by a brisker encounter with the cold, attempted to lessen the evil; and it was impossible to connect the idea of that frozen moonlight with anything but suffering and discontent.

Even the young blood of Basil was chilled within him; and though, in the course of his musings during the tragedy, he had made up his mind to proceed to Westminster and ascertain that the man whose eccentricities had so enthralled his attention was not wholly without assistance on such a night, yet, on emerging from the heated theatre into the frosty atmosphere without, his courage almost failed him.

As he issued from the public door in Bow-street adjoining the private one, a tiger in livery, with a cockade in his hat, touched it to him, and ran to resume his place in the cabriolet he had abandoned to the care of a brother atom in order to gossip

with the footmen in the entry. His attention attracted by this irregularity, Basil perceived that two of the cabs in waiting were those of John Maitland and Blencowe, both of which were always at his orders; and, aware that neither of them would be in request for two hours to come, he jumped into that of the latter, and having hurried as far as the entrance of Delahay-street, desired the lad to drive back to the theatre, and await his master, to whom he was to explain the occurrence. Thus secured from a chilly walk, Basil proceeded, on the opposite side of the pavement, to the house occupied by Abednego, and raised his eyes anxiously towards the attic story.

Not a gleam of light in the windows,—not a token of habitation!—The old man might have been left alone and fireless, to wrestle with his disease; nay, he might have sunk under it, united with the inclemency of the weather. It was just possible that the room occupied by the Money-lender

might not face the street,—for Annesley had taken no note in the morning of its look-out; but if not, the idea of an old man in a high fever, half suffocated with a quinsy,—a disease of all others demanding the watchfulness of an attendant—exposed to the chill of that deserted rat-hole, was, indeed, a picture of desolation.

In spite of the cold, he stood for some minutes wrapt in his cloak, contemplating the quaint old mansion. Then, as if conscious of the absurdity of interfering in the domestic affairs of one to whom he bore so little affinity, and who would probably resent his kindness as importunate or artful, he walked away as far as the corner of the street, on his road homeward. Again, however, his steps were arrested by a sense of the isolated wretchedness of A. O.!

"If the old creature should die in the night for want of aid!" murmured he; and, at the supposition, back he hastened to the

house, and stepping down to the door, rang gently at the bell.

Basil was prepared to allow the greatest possible latitude for the deliberation of the little sweeper, to whom, in sending the medicines from the chemist's, he had addressed a message, promising a reward on the morrow, if he adhered to his promise of not quitting the house. He therefore waited quietly at the door, till he conceived the poor urchin had found time to shuffle up stairs from the heap of shavings in the front kitchen, on which he had promised Basil to pass the night,—visiting, from time to time, the chamber-door of the invalid. But when five minutes had elapsed, Basil rang again;—at the end of ten, a third time.—Still, no answer!

Weary of standing in the cold, he began to exercise his personal observations by examining carefully through the area railings whether light were perceptible through the

cracks of the shutters;—the kitchen, in which Bill had promised to station himself bearing evidence, in the name of "front," of being overlooked by the street. But the most careful eye could detect no straggling gleam betokening habitation.

"Perhaps the poor boy may have fallen asleep in the cold," mused Basil, drawing his cloak closer about his ears. "If I were to try and wake him! A stone thrown against the shutter, perhaps, might rouse him up."

But where was a stone to be found on the frozen pavement of Delahay-street?—Though St. James's Park, and all its gravel, lay within distance of a stone's throw, Basil might as well have required an "entire and perfect chrysolite" to fling at the shutter, as a single pebble. After a moment's deliberation, he whistled loudly, in hopes that, if dozing, this signal might reach the ear of the boy.

In an instant, an answering whistle sounded shrilly from the opposite side of the street, and a rough hand was placed upon his collar! Basil started round to grapple with his antagonist, but stopped short on noticing the dress of a policeman! Ere he had time for explanation, two more ran up to the assistance of the first.

"Hold fast, Bill!" cried one of the newcomers, panting for breath.

"I've been watchin' on him this quarter of a hour," cried the original captor,—"seeing as he'd a heye to the parlour winders o' the old Jew. He's been trying skeleton keys, and what not, at the door.—S'pose we gives the alarm indoors? From his piping up, the chap has maybe got accomplices within."

"Ay, ay;—a put-up robbery——"

"Jist the flash-cut iv a Wist-ind burglar!"—cried the third policeman;—all three keeping such fast hold of the collar of

Basil, as to leave him scarcely breath for explanations, which, even when made, were utterly disregarded.

"A mighty likely story!"—exclaimed the constable from Great George Street, who had now come up, in answer to the summons of his subs.—"Gentlemen who come to inquire after the health of other gentlemen, do not whistle to the footmen down the ary!"—

"Nor try skiliton-kays at the front doore!"—added the third policeman.—

"Besides, the old fellow at this 'ere 'ouse hav'n't e'er a friend as ever anybody hear tell of," observed the original captor;—"and from his anxiousness to have his house watched, I've a notion there's property past common, inside."—

"In that case, knock at the door, and give an alarm to have the house searched,"—said the constable,—"B 947, will assist in carrying this fellow to the station-house."—

"No assistance will be required,—I am

quite willing to proceed there,"—said Annesley, perfectly composed. "But before I go, I should be glad to learn news of the old gentleman who resides here, who is dangerously ill."—

The men, who were holding him as tightly as though Jerry Abershaw or Dick Turpin were in their clutches, now inquired with expressive gestures, whether he saw any green in their eyes: to which inquiry, Basil replying by an eager renewal of the request he had addressed to the constable, B. 947, who, apparently less experienced in his calling than the rest, suggested that "no great 'arm 'ud be done by keeping him fast till the door uppened."—

"Do you suppose, Sir, that I require to be obstructed in my dooty by the likes of *you?*"—cried the indignant constable.—"I'm answerable to my super'ors, and that's enough.—Carry him off!"—said he, addressing the "infer'ors," with the dignity of a Dogberry—"I'll be after you in a jiffy."

Annesley was accordingly compelled to hurry off between the two policemen, without waiting to hear the result of the alarm at the door of A. O.!

He offered no resistance, — concluding that his explanations at the station-house would produce his immediate release; and was only vexed to perceive, on entering the crowd d room, that from the number of charges claiming priority, he should be some time detained. — It was no such pleasant sight to contemplate the number of wretches taken insensible from the door-steps of gin-shops ; or, though it still wanted an hour of midnight,—the set of miserable beings,— more miserable from being less insensible, apprehended as wandering homeless in the streets at that inclement season, — Basil Annesley was far from needing Shakspeare's admonishment—

> Take physic, Pomp!—
> Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,

in order to waken his sensibility to the

wants of his fellow-creatures: still, till that night, he had been scarcely aware of the nature and amount of wretchedness infesting the streets of the Great Babylon.

At length, his turn arrived; and he was beginning to launch forth into a simple narrative of what had befallen him, when he was authoritatively desired to hold his tongue; and the depositions of the police assumed their due precedence.

Let those who, after listening in either House to a dull debate, consisting of incoherent nothings, hemmed and hawed by one honourable member,—mumbled by a second, —mouthed by a third,—and executed in dumb show by the hands and lips of a fourth, (inaudible in the gallery,) peruse with wondering eyes on the following morning in the flowing periods of *The Times*, a concentration of the wisdom of Parliament, arranged under the several heads of "The Duke of ——;" "The Marquis of ——;" "The Honourable Member for Finsbury,"

or the honourable member for no-matter-what,—as a fair and true representation of the bald disjointed chat of the preceding night,—conjecture the amazement of Basil on hearing a most consistent and plausible narrative of his exploits as a burglar!—His face was recognised by several present as familiar at Marlborough Street; and one, more general of information than the rest, facetiously reminded him of his two months at "the Mill!"—

It was rather a relief than a vexation when an examination of his person was ordered, preparatory to his being locked up for the night;—knowing that, instead of the skeleton keys and jemmy imputed to him, the property in his great coat pockets would confirm the identity he had asserted.

When, however, the initials on his handkerchief, and the name inscribed in a pocket-book containing his letters and memoranda, had sufficed, as he fondly imagined, to prove the delinquent of Brixton Mill to

be an officer of the Guards, of honourable reputation, and he was anticipating apologies from the Inspector, new grounds of suspicion presented themselves!—The fellow who taxed his face with having been "up a matter o' twenty times at Mobbro Street," suggested that the "soortoo might have been prigged" from the rightful owner, and worn with all his property, in order to establish an alias for the thief!—

"If you will send a messenger to the Guards' Club, and request Captain Blencowe, whose Cab is waiting there, either to drive hither and identify me, or despatch one of my brother officers for that purpose, or even his own servant who accompanied me an hour ago to Delahay Street, you will perceive that these men have deposed falsely, or rather to thrice as much as the truth!"—said Basil, in a tone that startled the benumbed faculties of the stultified Inspector; and after some further discussion among the deponents, he was locked up to abide the result of the message.

Three quarters of an hour did poor Annesley await the return of the policeman despatched to St. James's Street; in a room reeking with the vapours of gin and tobacco, emitted by three ragged human beings who lay huddled together, two upon a flock bed in a corner of the strong room; the third upon the floor, and breathing so hard and irregularly, as to betoken an apoplectic seizure rather than mere drunkenness. It was in vain he remonstrated against being placed in collision with these outcasts. The charge of false-witnessing he had made against the police force, exposed him to the utmost rigour of what is called the Law.

At length, when heated and chafed almost to frenzy by this untimely incarceration and revolting companionship, the grating lock intimated that his probation was at an end; and he was summoned back into the police room,—now hotter than ever, and crowded with new committals.

The first objects that struck him (their Chesterfield wrappers and laughing faces affording a singular contrast to the uniforms of the policemen and filthy tatters of the prisoners) were Maitland and Wilberton, arm in arm, who, having issued from the supper-table into the frosty air on Annesley's summons, were just sufficiently affected by the cigars and brandy and water they had taken at starting, to enjoy beyond measure the part they proposed to play. Though satisfied by Basil's message of the nature of his scrape, they pretended, on reaching the station-house, to believe themselves summoned at the impudent instigation of an impostor; and the consequence was, that, on emerging from the lock-up room, the prisoner found himself treated quite as cavalierly as before.

"Never saw the fellow in my life!" stammered Wilberton, who, more elated than his companion, was delighted at the prospect of

the spree proposed by John Maitland, by way of retaliation on Basil's pretended engagement. "Some drunken dog of—of a pickpocket,—who has made fr—free with our names!"—

"It is deuced hard that a gentleman should be disturbed from his supper on such absurd pretences!" added Maitland, assuming an air of drunken indignation.

Annesley was now about to be removed to a cell for the remainder of the night, when something in the rollicking air and exulting tone of the two witnesses, so far attracted the notice of the experienced Inspector, that when Basil, appealing to him in the gentlemanly tone which rarely fails of effect, entreated that the servant or servants who had driven down with the two gentlemen to the Station might be called in, he readily complied. But before Maitland's tiger had time to make his appearance, whose testimony must put an end to the

mystery, his master had begun to address Annesley by the name of "old fellow!" and to treat the matter as a joke.

The result was the instant release of the supposed burglar. Nothing had been found upon him confirmatory of the depositions of B 947, who had already sneaked off in anticipation of being given in charge in his turn;—and, by way of conciliating the ex-prisoner, who, ere he followed his jocose friends out of the station-house, intimated his intention of lodging a complaint with the magistrates on the morrow, the Inspector acquainted him that, unable to obtain ingress to the house in Delahay Street, and seriously alarmed for the safety of its inmate, the policemen had attempted to force the door,—the noise of which brought down the old man from his attic, pistols in hand, to certify his own safety.

"Nevertheless," added the Inspector, "the constable, who persuaded him to a parley with the chain up, states that the

old gentleman was in such a state of debility that his voice was scarcely audible;—which account, Sir, ought certainly to have induced more belief than I accorded to the motive you adduced for visiting him at so strange a hour."

On his release from the tyranny of the police, Basil determined to return instantly to Delahay Street; being now certain that the little sweeper had proved false to his charge, and that the miserable old man was left alone.

Just as he was quitting the door of the station-house, resisting the officious offers of a raggamuffin loitering near the door to run and fetch him a cab, a strange figure appeared at the corner of the street, which, but for its venturing so near the head-quarters of the law, might easily have been mistaken for one of the calling to which Basil had just escaped the imputation of belonging.—But the moon shone too brightly through the clear atmosphere, to admit of

any deception in the eyes of Annesley, who instantly discerned in that unsightly form the individual to whose aid he was hastening, as perhaps on a bed of death!—

"What, in God's name, Sir, has tempted you out in your present state on such a night?"—cried Basil, eagerly accosting him.

But the answer was wholly unintelligible. Abednego leaned heavily against the area-railings of an adjoining house, as if overcome by his feelings or his infirmities, and groaned aloud.

"Fetch a coach!" cried Basil, to the fellow who had been importuning him,—perceiving that, short as was the distance to Delahay Street, there was much doubt whether the strength of the sick man would enable him to retrace his steps;—and while listening to the broken gasps, half invective, half endearment, in which Abednego attempted to express anger at his young friend's officiousness, and indignation at the dilemma into which it had betrayed him, a vehicle rattled

up. The manner in which the invalid, after being lifted in, sunk breathless into a corner, convinced Basil Annesley that his previous anxieties were not exaggerated.

"It is as much as his life is worth to have encountered the night-air on such a night!" burst involuntarily from his lips, as he compared the warm interest entertained in his behalf by the eccentric old Jew, with the desertion of his gay associates;—and a hoarse ejaculation of "MY life!" which escaped the lips of his companion, was the only intelligible sound that reached the ear of Basil till they stopped before the door in Delahay Street.—

"You must allow me to assist you up stairs," said Basil, as the coachman held open the coach door, and Abednego, taking a pass-key from his waistcoat pocket, prepared to open his own.—

"No, no!" muttered the old man,—"I tell you, no!—*Who* is to put the chain up after you, when you quit the house?"—

But the effort he had made for this explanation proved too much for him; and on reaching his door, he tottered and would have fallen, while attempting to place the key in the lock, had not Annesley started forward and supported him in his arms. A low moaning now escaped his lips; and Annesley having taken the key from his icy hand, and pushed open with his foot the slowly yielding door, carried him into the hall, and placed him on a bench.—After returning to pay and dismiss the coachman, he carefully closed the street door; and even so far conceded to the habits of Abednego as to bar it and put up the chain, ere he snatched with one hand the filthy iron lamp which the Jew had left burning on the pavement of the hall, on his departure for the station-house, and offered his arm to A. O., who was gradually reviving.

"Let me see you up stairs, Sir," said Basil. "It is useless declining my assistance. The night is half over, and since I

know you to be alone in the house, I swear to you that I will not quit it before morning!"

The suffering man seemed fully aware of his incompetency under the influence of growing indisposition to dispute the point with his young companion; for, instead of offering further resistance, he accepted the proffered arm of Basil, and attempted to ascend the stairs.

The task, however, was by no means easy. His respiration was all but impeded by the increased swelling and inflammation of his throat: and on attaining the second landing, he clung with both hands to the arm of Annesley, and panted for breath.

It was not till after the lapse of some minutes that they were able to attain the attic, the door of which was locked,—from habit more than as a security, since there was no other human being in the house.

They entered the room: Basil saw with concern that there was not a vestige of fire;

and that his suffering companion had risen from his miserable bed to answer the summons of the police. From the iron lamp he carried, young Annesley hastily lighted a candle that stood on the table, which, in strange contradiction to the habits of Abednego, proved to be of wax.

"Give me the lamp!"—faltered the old man, rising from the *bergère* into which he had sunk exhausted on entering.—"I have wood and shavings in the other room. Since you choose to abide with me, I suppose I must kindle a fire."

"Not on *my* account, Sir!" said Basil, eagerly; but on reflecting that the sentiment of hospitality might be the only means of inducing the old gentleman to bestow upon himself a necessary indulgence, he desisted, and Abednego tottered, grumbling, into the adjoining chamber.

Thus left alone, on casting his eyes around him upon that wretched room, as much a place of penance as the police

cell he had quitted, Basil noticed that, on a low table beside the flock bed, lay the book borrowed that morning by his host,—and beside it, a large crucifix of Berlin iron,—and a folded paper!—A CRUCIFIX!—The world then, and his own suspicions, had decided wrongfully!—Abednego the Money-lender was only in name and practices a Jew!—

While pondering upon this startling discovery, a heavy fall in the adjoining closet attracted Basil's attention; and though believing it to proceed only from a log of the wood mentioned by his singular host, he hurried to his assistance.—Either A. O. had entangled his feet in the long wrapper in which he had enveloped himself to confront the night air, or had fallen from weakness;—for there he lay, stretched upon the heap of mingled coals, cinders, and fragments of old wood, that encumbered one corner of the room!

The old man had struck himself too in

the fall; for on lifting him up, Basil perceived, by the light of the lamp, (which, though overturned on the floor, was not extinguished,) that blood was gushing from his lips.—Lifting him hastily in his arms, he bore him like a child into the adjoining attic, and placed him on the bed;—Abednego groaning heavily at intervals,—either from illness, or the disastrous effects of his accident.

His host thus manifestly disabled, Basil felt entitled to bestir himself according to his own inventions. He was there alone, in the dead of night, without aid or comfort, in sole charge of a sick or dying man. It was no moment for scruples or nicety.—Throwing off his great coat, and hastily gathering, from the heap in the adjoining room, materials for a fire, he soon produced a blaze in the rusty old grate, which diffused some degree of cheerfulness, and promised gradually to diffuse warmth through the desolate apartment.

An old kettle stood within the fender; but as it proved empty, Basil proceeded to a stone water-jug that stood in a corner of the room, to replenish it. Alas! the water in the pitcher was frozen!—In order to break the ice, which resisted his hand, Basil took up a faggot stick lying near it on the floor; and the crash caused by the fracture seemed to rouse the faculties of Abednego, who instantly woke as from a stupor.

"What mischief are you doing there?" gasped he, evidently only partially sensible. "What have you broken?—I have not kept a piece of crockery entire since you began to wait upon me!—And how dare you light that monstrous fire?—Fool!—what have I to roast here besides your own wretched limbs, that you thus waste my fuel?"

From the little Basil Annesley could gather of this apostrophe, uttered in a hoarse whisper, he saw that Abednego's

head was wandering with fever, and that he mistook him for the little sweeper.

Without attempting to undeceive him, he persisted in his self-imposed task;—filled the kettle, set it on the fire,—and having found untouched the packet of dried lime-flowers he had despatched from the chemist's for an infusion, prepared a drink for the sick man, such as he remembered to have been administered to himself at Heidelberg, by the mother of Esther.

There was some difficulty in finding a cup in which to offer it to Abednego. As a last resource, Basil took from a shelf behind him what appeared to be a bronze ornament, which afterwards proved to be an antique silver goblet, a *chef-d'œuvre* of one of the old chasers of Lombardy!

The invalid drank and seemed comforted. His moans became less heavy.—After a time he opened his eyes, and breathed as though the oppression of his chest were in

some degree relieved. By degrees, and before he altogether regained his consciousness, Basil removed his outer garments, and having placed them under his pillow as a prop to his head, covered him closely up with the quilt of his wretched pallet.—

With a second cup of the hot infusion, he now mixed some antimony as prescribed by the chemist he had consulted; and the invalid having again, almost mechanically, swallowed the soothing infusion, Basil left it to exercise its effect, and, wearied by his unaccustomed exertions, flung himself into the old *bergère* before the fireplace for rest and reflection.

The strangeness of his own situation afforded, of course, the first subject of his cogitations!—There was *he*, who had indignantly rebutted as an imputation, the charge of intimacy with A. O., brought against him at Lady Maitland's by Blencowe and his set—actually established as sick-nurse beside his bed in a filthy garret:—

performing for him menial offices which he would have hesitated to execute for persons having claims upon his kindness!

Only a few nights before, his mother had refused to accept offices far less humiliating from him, in behalf of an old and faithful servant;—and now, he was attending, sole servitor, on the dying bed of a stranger,—whose very existence, a little month before, had been utterly unknown to him!—

But the strangest of all these incongruities was, that, for the life and soul of him, he could not bring himself to regard Abednego Osalez as a stranger! Some mysterious tie appeared to unite them.—Though the common but most holy tie of fellow-creatureship, including even the Money-lender under the Biblical designation of "neighbour," ought to have sufficed as a motive for the exertions of the young Samaritan, so as to need no further adducement, Basil Annesley, as he contemplated the smoky fireplace, did not conceal from himself that he felt as if seated

beside the hearth of one with whom he had been long accustomed to break bread, and take counsel.

And yet, the man who lay breathing heavy and unconscious on that wretched pallet, was one whose vocation and habits were hateful to the generous mind of the young soldier! Though the vigorous language and force of intellect of Abednego had invested the calling of the Money-lender with a new character in the eyes of Basil,—though the keenness of his soul and greatness of his speculations had interposed a sort of veil over the littleness of his daily doings, and the detestable nature of his usury,—young Annesley did not attempt to disguise from himself that the man who contemplated with such far-sighted philosophy the value and social influence of money, was in practice a pettifogging miser!—

Still, with all the inconsistency and odiousness of his pursuits, Basil was conscious

of involuntary deference towards the proprietor of that filthy garret!—

The power of thought,—the magic of the mind,

the energy of soul of one so immeasurably superior to his own position, and so strangely master of the destinies of others, threw a sort of halo round the gloom of the place. It was such wilful, wayward, self-denying misery!—There was such a force of will, such a concentration of self-infliction in the privations of the starving *millionaire*,—that he felt as if contemplating De Rancé in the cells of La Trappe, or Charles V. in those of St. Quintin, rather than a vulgar miser undergoing his wilful Prometheanism! While gazing on those denuded walls, if it were possible to abhor, it was not easy to despise the inmate of that iron chest of unavailing treasure!—

His greatest source of annoyance, now that he was satisfied of having afforded the

best succour in his power to the physical ailments of the sick man, arose from the certainty of having exposed himself to the unsparing raillery of his brother officers.—Devoid as they were of entertainment at that season of the year, they would not fail to discuss among themselves his solitary visit to the theatre, after the pretext of an engagement; his having driven in Blencowe's cab to what would otherwise have passed for some rendezvous, but what was now discovered to be a midnight visit to A. O.;—a visit, moreover, so unauthorized, as to have caused him to be taken up as a burglar, and exposed him to the chance of a night in the station-house!—

It was not to be expected that such men as Wilberton and Maitland would deal leniently with these discoveries; and old Carrington was now too stale as a butt, not to impart due value to an adventure which exposed young Annesley for ever and a day to the bantering of those who had already

so moved his choler by qualifying him as the arm-in-arm companion of the Money-lender !—

In order to escape the annoyance of his anticipations on this provoking subject, Basil proceeded to take from the table, the only book that naked room afforded for his amusement;—even the volume of Hollar which Abednego had so strangely chosen as the consolation of his hours of sickness !—

As he removed it stealthily from the table, in order not to awaken the sick man from his unquiet slumbers, he inadvertently brushed down the paper lying beside it, and stooped to restore it to the table. In the displacement something fell out.—On searching upon the floor, it proved to be a lock of hair;—a long, long tress, coil within coil,—which it was impossible not to recognise as that of a woman,—and difficult not to surmise as that of a woman young and lovely;—so silken was its texture,—so rich its hue !—

Without the smallest intention of prying into the household secrets of his host, Basil could not replace it in the paper without discerning this.—He even noticed the peculiar colour of the hair. It was a rare tint; yet long familiar to his eyes as that of a tress, all but similar, which he carried in his pocket-book, and which had been recently unfolded before him during the insolent examination at the police-office:—His mother's hair!—not silvered as now by the hand of time and influence of care;—but rich and glossy as during her sunny youth. Basil regarded this lock, which he had obtained as a gift from Dorcas without his mother's knowledge, as the most precious treasure in his possession.

Irresistibly impelled to compare it with the tress he had now discovered in the possession of the Money-lender, he drew forth his pocket-book, abstracted it from the paper, and placed them side by side. Not the variation of a hair in the length—

not the difference of a shade in their hue!—They were one and the same!—The most indifferent observer would have decided, as Basil was for a moment inclined to decide, that they had been shred from the same beloved head!

But could this be? What analogy—what connexion could exist, or could ever have existed between them? The Money-lender of Greek Street, Soho, and the widow of Sir Bernard Annesley!—The haughty daughter of the proudest of ambassadors,—Lord L——, and the thrifty artful usurer,—the degraded—the notorious—the infamous A. O.!—

CHAPTER III.

Tell me tales of thy first love,
April hopes—the fools of chance—
Till the graves begin to move,
Till the dead begin to dance.—TENNYSON.

SCARCELY less sad than the scene in which young Annesley was officiating, was the one in which, at the same moment, his mother was acting a part equally humane, in her dreary abode at Barlingham Grange.

The old gardener was no more. The burst of feeling of which Basil had been a spectator, proved to be the last effort of expiring nature; and it was the lady to whom from her childhood he had been devoted,

who closed the glassy eyes of the old man, and placed the watch-lights beside the dead!

Lady Annesley was, perhaps, the inmate of the Grange best qualified for that solemn duty. Her mind, rendered stern by habitual contact with care, was now of a consistency to encounter without trembling all or any of those earnest duties of life, from which the gentle hearts and hands of her sex shrink with terror, before either the one or the other have been wrung under the influence of anguish or remorse.

Like one moving in her sleep, she had breathed in the ears of old Nicholas the prayers appointed by the Church for a dying bed; and if this effort were perhaps instigated by reluctance to expose the revelations of his infirm intellect to the ears of a stranger, it was no such apprehension that induced her to assist the sobbing Dorcas in straightening his limbs for the grave, ere consigned by the proper attendants to his

last home. Once placed in his coffin, she quitted the room;—quitted it with a heavy sigh—an in-breathed prayer! Early sorrows had been bitterly renewed by her trying attendance on the old man, who had unconsciously wounded her to the quick by his incoherent ravings;—and above all, by the hazard to which they had exposed her of betrayal to the child of her heart.—But he was now at rest.—Both had done their duty. The grey-headed man was released from his earthly penance;—it was she alone who remained to suffer and to atone!

Every person whose feelings have been excited by the performance of some severe and engrossing duty, must have been conscious of a strange vacuity of feeling when the influence of that painful tension is at an end. Like a sufferer whose infirm or shattered limb has been removed by the surgeon, undefinable sensations of uneasiness seem to possess its vacant place. So harassed had been Lady Annesley during the

continuance of the gardener's illness, and the perpetual hazards to which it exposed her, that, on the afternoon of the day in which he was laid in the grave, when the old house was restored to its usual mournful quietude, and the two women in their mourning suits kept moving silently and sadly about her, she could not settle to her customary occupations.

Involuntarily, she re-entered the room which had been appropriated to the use of the deceased—the threshold of which she had never crossed of late, save under the influence of awe and remorse. All was restored to its usual form. The winter sun was shining through the open casement; and driven back by the piercing atmosphere thus admitted, she had no resource but her own warm sitting-room, and the solace of her books and desk.

Nothing more common than for people of the world, on hearing some compulsory recluse complain of the cheerlessness of soli-

tude, to exclaim,—"But why not read to amuse yourself?" in pursuance of the common-place encomiums of "the sunshine of the mind produced by study," which our copy-book morality inflicts upon the use of schools. But the notion of reading for amusement entertained by such people, consists in a first-class subscription to a fashionable library, ensuring the earliest perusal of popular works,—new novels, brilliant periodicals,—holding up to the eye, as in a mirror, a reflection of the progress of civilization, and a picture of the manners and prosperities of the day.

Lady Annesley's book-case, on the contrary, contained only old editions of the works of past centuries;—philosophy rendered obsolete by modern improvement;—and theology purporting to split so fine the straws of doctrinal casuistry, as to reduce them to chaff.—The few sterling books she possessed, the bosom comforters to which we turn in sickness and sorrow, had been

her sole companions for twenty lonely years; and with all one's partiality for a favourite writer, it is not more impossible for the dried leaves of the rose to retain the hue and fragrance of the living flower, than for the hundredth perusal to yield the charm of the first. It may indeed, perhaps, when voluntarily culled from the shelves of a voluminous library. But it is only the uninformed and unimaginative mind of the peasant, that can derive amusement, Sunday after Sunday, throughout a long life, from his solitary volume of the "Pilgrim's Progress."

Lady Annesley had been more than once forced to admit to herself, that her little library had ceased to charm; and if she pined after anything in her seclusion, it was for the charm of new books to create a new order of ideas, or a happier combination of the old. But on that cheerless afternoon, she felt as if those ancient companions of her sorrow might perhaps

renew their charm; and in accordance with the promptings of the solemn scene of the morning, in the little village church, wherein she had seen ashes reconsigned to ashes, and dust to dust, she proceeded to her book-shelf to take down her favourite Holbein, with its well-remembered philosophical interleavings. It was gone!—The book was included in a set of six volumes of favourite works,—the Essays of Montaigne, and George Herbert's Manual—all in the same antique binding. Of these, five alone remained;—the copy of Hollar was no longer there!

Lady Annesley felt surprised and angry. So undisturbed was the tenour of her life, that no person but herself and her two waiting-women ever crossed the threshold of that chamber; of whom, Hannah could not read or write, while Dorcas was one of those fortunate individuals who find better companionship in the seam they are sewing, than the choicest *chef-d'œuvre* of genius.

Still, either the one or the other might

have been tempted by the striking designs of the book, to remove it from the room for more leisurely inspection. She rang and inquired. Neither of them had ever noticed either the existence or the disappearance of the book!—She now demanded whether, during her attendance on the gardener, any stranger had been admitted into the room.

"No person whatever!" was the reply.

"Most strange and most vexatious!" was her rejoinder;—adding, in the depths of her heart,—"So few as are the relics I retain of those days,—so few and so precious,—ill could I afford to part with *this!*"—

"It was, perhaps, Master Basil who borrowed the book?" suggested Dorcas, struck with a brilliant idea. "The morning he was forced to remain here, after your ladyship's fainting fit, he was hours moping alone here, in the morning room. Perhaps he had begun to read it, and took it with him to finish on the road?"—

Lady Annesley expressed a contrary con-

viction, and dismissed her attendant. Yet so probable was the surmise, that the moment she was alone again, she seized a pen, and addressed an inquiry on the subject to her son. She had intended deferring till the morrow intelligence of the decease of poor old Nicholas; but in the eagerness of her desire to assure herself of the fate of her book, she lost not a moment.

Nothing could be more embarrassing than to address Basil on the subject of their old servant's demise; for she had ventured no subsequent explanation with her son after the terrible scene in which they had borne a part; and she was consequently uncertain whether suspicions had been excited on the part of Basil, or whether he attributed the terrible revelations of the gardener solely to aberration of intellect.

The moment, however, that her mind became possessed by anxiety concerning her beloved volume, she lost sight of these considerations; and after narrating to him with

simple succinctness, the death and burial of one who, she said, "had been to her as a friend when her own kith and kin had deserted her—a good, faithful, and submissive servant, in days of adversity as in days more prosperous,"—she proceeded to inquire whether he could give her any tidings of the missing book.

"You are my only son, Basil," wrote Lady Annesley; "nay, the estrangement and prosperity of your sister render you my only heir. Yet a few years, and the little I possess will be your own. Even now, I am not, I trust, sparing in administering to your comfort, or prodigal in the indulgence of my own. I cannot therefore think, Basil, —I would willingly not believe,—that you have surreptitiously abstracted from my house an object which you know I prize. How *much* I prize it, you are not able to conjecture. I shall go down to my grave, and neither you nor others will ever learn how dear—yet how cruel—are the recollections

with which that relic is connected.—In my solitude here, I live but in the past. *That* which is gone—*those* who are gone, encompass me with an atmosphere holy and precious as themselves.—The Hope that abideth in *you*, the Memory that abideth in *them*,—hath a joy which is not of this world. I know not what I write; the loss of this book has disordered me!—It seems as if one of the unrestorable treasures of past affection were wrested from me for ever!—

"No delay, Basil, I entreat! Write to me, if you have any communication to make touching the object in question. Fear no reproaches on my part, if it should prove that your hands indeed removed it from my house. Too happy shall I be to welcome it back again, to hazard a single accusing word!"—

Such was the letter despatched from Barlingham Grange!—Such the letter which Basil Annesley drew from his pocket beside

a decent camp-bed established in the attic of A. O., on the fifth morning after the critical night of his disorder.

So imminent had appeared the danger of the Money-lender on the morrow of his vigils, that young Annesley,—doubly alarmed by the responsibility devolving on himself should the death of a man so richly endowed occur under his solitary guardianship and circumstances so suspicious,—had despatched the sweeper for the aid of his regimental surgeon; through whose means, he had subsequently procured a proper attendant, and a few of the necessaries of life.

Abednego was now too heavily oppressed by disease to take heed of the arrival of strangers or bedding in his attic; and all that Basil could do in excuse for their introduction into the treasury of treasuries, (should the old man survive to question his proceedings,) was to seal up the doors of the different rooms and the invaluable bureau, and give up a daily portion of his time

to the superintendence of the establishment.

Abednego was, however, more cognizant than he surmised of what was passing around him. He was aware of his own danger; aware of the urgent necessity for the precautions taken; and the nurse proving a decent, dull woman, content to sit quiet in view whenever not employed in serving him, he was better satisfied she should be there, than that the house should be surrendered to the discretion of Bill the sweeper.

Still, Basil had little idea how often, during his absence, the sufferer raised his head from his pillow, to inquire of the woman in attendance the hour of the day,—the length of time that had elapsed since the young man's departure,—and what promise he had given of return.—He had little idea how completely he imparted light and life to that sinking frame!—He could imagine, of course, that his disinterested services had proved acceptable to the infirm Money-lender. He

knew that Abednego must be aware how solicitude in his behalf had exposed him to one of the most disagreeable dilemmas it had ever been his luck to encounter; and though such was the state of weakness consequent on the yielding of the quinsy, that they had as yet held no conversation on the subject, young Annesley naturally conceived the sufferer to be gratefully and kindly disposed.—It was enough for him, however, that so whimsical a being had not seen fit to resent his interference; and he looked forward to the convalescence of the invalid rather as a relief to himself from a painful and responsible attendance, than from any desire to receive his thanks or accord explanations in return.

The receipt of Lady Annesley's letter startled him into other feelings. It was urgent that he should regain possession of the book, and lose no time in restoring it to his mother. But how was this to be accomplished? It had disappeared from the

table, as well as the crucifix and paper containing the lock of hair; and the nurse, who seldom or never quitted the room, declared that she knew nothing of it. That the invalid, still scarcely able to lift his head from his pillow, should have removed it, appeared improbable; and Abednego was so weak, and, above all, so peevish, from the effects of illness, that Basil had scarcely courage to molest him with inquiries.

"If he only surmised," thought young Annesley, as he sat contemplating the embarrassments of the case, "how mysterious a resemblance exists between her hair for whose pleasure I require the book, and the lock he seems to treasure with such wild devotion, he would forgive my importunity."

On entering the room on the morning he received the letter, Basil accosted the invalid with his usual inquiries concerning his night's rest and the visit of the surgeon.

"Your doctor is to come no more," said Abednego, faintly. "I paid and dismissed

him last night. It was only to satisfy *you* I bore with him, as I now bear with the old woman dozing yonder in my easy chair. But for her being here, how do I know that you would not come tormenting me again at midnight, to light my fire and snuff my candle?"

"By all this, Sir, I perceive that you feel much better! It is only the man in health who quarrels with his physician. As to the nurse, you will admit her to be a safer guardian for you than a beggar from the street," added Basil, in a lower voice.

"That is as it may prove," retorted Abednego, gruffly. "In the time of the Plague, Defoe informs us that such nurses used to twist the windpipes of their patients. Thank Heaven, I am now strong enough to take care of my own! However, till I can make my fire, and boil my kettle, she is welcome to remain. She 'finds *herself*,' as such people call it, and gives me less trouble than I give her. Nor is there much here,"

he continued, glancing round the naked walls, "to attract pilfering fingers."

"There *were* things here," Basil began,—perceiving that the nurse was really asleep, under the influence of a crackling fire on a frosty day—"there were objects here, at the commencement of your illness, which I see no longer; and the disappearance of which makes me somewhat uneasy."

"How mean you?" cried Abednego, raising himself on his elbow, and pushing aside the curtains to peer out upon the bureau which contained property to the amount of thousands upon thousands.

"No need to look so far, or so anxiously," observed Basil. "The things I speak of are of no such urgent value,—save, perhaps, to you and myself,—an iron crucifix—a time-worn book——"

"And what do you suppose to have become of them, pray?" cried Abednego, sharply, letting fall the curtain, and sinking back again on his pillow.

"I was in hopes, Sir, *you* might be able to inform me."

"And if I were—are you so miserly with your property, that you cannot trust me with an old book?"

"I would trust you with any property belonging to myself;—the care you take of your own satisfies me that mine would run no danger of being mislaid while in your keeping. Unluckily, I have little either to lend or to give; so that you are unlikely to be much the better for my confidence."

"But when I tell you that, valueless as it may seem to *you*, I hold to that book——"

"I should still be under the necessity of——"

"When I tell you," persisted Abednego, not heeding his interruption, "that it is my comfort by day and by night,—that in the anguish of my disease it lay upon my bosom, and soothed its throbbings,—that, in the darkness of my despair, it shed light and

peace around me, as from the wings of an angel."—

Basil began to entertain an opinion that the senses of the invalid were again wandering.

"When I swear to you, that while treasured here,—here, beneath my pillow,—here, side by side with the emblem of eternal redemption—(dear to me as to yourself, although the lying world opprobriate me by the name of Jew)—it has yielded me more comfort than the Cross of Faith, with all its promises of Heaven—do you *still* desire to take it from me?—No, no, Basil! leave it,—unless you wish to see me sink again into the bruised and breathless mummy to which I was reduced when you snatched me from the grave!"

Basil Annesley was silent. To dispute with him on a point that seemed so trifling, at a moment thus critical, seemed an act of cruelty; yet to disappoint the anxious ex-

pectations of Lady Annesley was a deed yet more unpardonable.

"I told you, Sir," said he, in a hesitating tone, and after a long pause, "that the book was not my own, and that I had abstracted it from home without the concurrence of my mother."

"Well?" demanded Abednego, again drawing aside the curtains, and fixing his piercing eyes upon those of his visitor.

"She has demanded it back again. She is greatly displeased at my having removed it from Barlingham."

"Send her down the last new novel from Hookham's!" muttered A. O., with bitter scorn; "the lady will doubtless consider it a profitable exchange!"

"You are too presumptuous, Sir, in deciding upon the tastes and feelings of a perfect stranger," retorted Basil, with spirit. "You little know the woman you pretend to judge! Never in my days did I see a novel in the hands of my mother! Her

studies are severe as her conduct is exemplary."

"A saint, eh?—Then send her a bale of sermons from Hatchard's! What matter under what form the weak nature of woman accepts its subjugating influence? Novels, poems, tracts——"

"In one word," said Basil, drawing Lady Annesley's letter from his pocket, "read, and judge for yourself, whether a woman, so exalted in heart and mind as the writer of this, is likely to accept ANY exchange for the book she prizes!"

On seeing his mother's sacred handwriting pass into the withered hands of Abednego, Basil almost repented the concession he had made. It was degrading a letter of hers to expose it to the eyes of a Money-lender! The deed, however, was done!

In order to give time to A. O., in his weak condition, for the perusal of the letter, Basil Annesley walked gently to the window so as not to rouse the nurse from her doze. There

was nothing very interesting in the look out. A mass of icicles, appended to the leaden water-pipe of the opposite attic, was the most interesting object he found to contemplate.

At the close of a few minutes, he returned to the bedside, intending to resume his conversation with Abednego. But all was still as the grave! No movement—not a sound! The old man uttered not a word, and made no attempt to give back the letter. At last, in a gentle voice of expostulation, Basil addressed him, and addressed him in vain!

Young Annesley now drew aside the curtains of the bed; and found that no vestige of its inmate was perceptible. Abednego had gathered up the bed-clothes over his head. Like some mourner of scriptural times, he had covered his face with his garment, and was weeping bitterly.

Agitated, in his turn, by this unaccountable emotion, Basil Annesley was beginning to feel intolerably bewildered by the baffling

mysteries that seemed to involve the fatal volume, his removal of which from Barlingham had been the cause of such general disturbance.—

"For the love of Heaven, Sir," cried he, "explain all this!—Explain the interest which you and every one else appear to attach to that accursed book—the source of distress to all with whom I am concerned!"

Still Abednego answered not a syllable. By the movements of the clothes in which he had enveloped himself, Basil could alone infer the struggles of his emotion.

"I beseech you, Sir," cried the young man, after a second pause, "if you entertain the least kindness for me—if you feel towards me a thousandth part of the goodwill which has prompted my own exertions in your behalf, tell me the meaning of your tears. They had not been wrung out of such a soul as yours, save by some all-powerful interest. You are not woman-hearted, to weep for wantonness, or from

the weakness of mere exhaustion.—Tell me——"

"I can tell you nothing," murmured Abednego, uncovering his face, and shewing the letter of Lady Annesley crushed in his hand by the grasp of uncontrollable passion —"save that this letter has roused emotions dormant for years. I had not thought—I had not dreamed—that this woman had retired from the world to ponder over feelings such as these!" and again, with trembling hand, he grasped the letter.—"I believed her, cold and callous as she was once worldly! I believed—but no matter! These few words have wrung a dew out of the stony depths of my heart, of which I believed the fountains to be long dried up!—Thanks, Basil Annesley—this is not the first benefit you have bestowed upon me!—Thanks!—Here—take your book!" he continued, drawing the volume from beneath his pillow. "But, unless you would convulse her heart with agony, as you have unwittingly con-

vulsed mine, tell her not, on your life, through what strange hands it has experienced a momentary transit! Unless you wish to be expulsed for ever from your mother's house —unless you wish to incur her malediction, never, *never*, while you live, breathe in the ear of that unhappy woman, the reprobated name of Abednego Osalez!"—

Ere the sufferer ceased to speak, his voice was becoming lost in broken sobs; and so terrible and absorbing was his emotion, that Basil had not courage to pursue the anxious inquiries suggesting themselves to his mind. He was overpowered by the spectacle of so profoundly-felt a grief.

In order to relieve the feelings of the old man from his observation, he again rose and walked to the window, endeavouring to straighten and restore to his pocket the book and crumpled letter replaced in his hands by Abednego.

By the time he finished his task and returned to the bedside, the old man had com-

pletely recovered his self-possession, and was lying with his face exposed in all its usual harsh composedness of feature.

"*You* are the comptroller of my household *now*," said he, addressing Basil with a grim attempt at a smile. "Tell me, does the poor boy still officiate as my lackey?"

"Bill is installed down stairs, Sir, to answer the inquiries of your numerous visitors," replied Basil, somewhat startled by his change of tone.

"Ay, ay!—I wonder, while you were about it, you had not the street laid with straw, and the knocker tied up, as for some dainty goosecap's lying-in!" muttered Abednego, forcing a laugh.

"Perhaps I might have done so, Sir, but from the fear of offending you," replied Basil, attempting to smile in his turn. "Methinks I have taken liberties enough in your establishment."

"My illness must have caused no little commotion among my customers!" resumed

Abednego, evidently intent upon distracting Basil's recollections from his recent struggle of feeling.—" There are more people interested in the life and death of A. O. than in the fairest of the childbed puppets in fine linen, we were talking of !—Sore are their misgivings, poor prodigal souls, concerning the hands into which, on my decease, their bonds and securities might fall!—To *them* it is a matter of fame and name that the heir of the old Jew should prove a man as trustworthy as himself!"—

" There has been some anxiety testified, Sir, I must admit, if *that* be any consolation to you," replied young Annesley. " Every day, from twelve till two, the door is besieged, I am told, with applicants, concerning not alone your house in Greek Street, but dozens of other houses.—But as I am by no means qualified to act as your clerk or deputy, you must consult Bill on your recovery. Having little appetite for

business, I have left all such matters in his hands."

"But my *letters?*"—inquired A. O., feeling, or affecting anxiety.

"As soon as you are better, the boy shall bring them up to you."

"I *am* better,—I *am* better,—I am quite well already!"—cried his companion, settling himself in bed. "I am always well enough for business!"—

Having roused up the nurse by a touch on the shoulder, Basil now despatched her down stairs in search of the letters and papers left for A. O.; of which, on her return, she brought back an apron full.

"I find that you have had certain fair inquirers," observed Basil, while the woman was away,—"fully confirming your former attestation to me of the advantages of a Money-lender's calling!—You have had those pressing and suing to be admitted to see *you*,—to be admitted to see whom, others are eager suitors!—You have had the

Duke of Rochester here twice a-day, evidently believing your illness to be a subterfuge; and in the other room, there is a whole bale of necessaries,—sugar, arrow-root, wax-candles,—despatched to you, *not* by a grocer's wife, (as the nature of the gift seems to indicate,) but by no less a person than the lovely Countess of Winterfield?"

Abednego replied by a hoarse chuckle.

"I should starve, but for that woman; and her family might starve but for *me!*" cried he, turning exultingly on his pillow. "She is the purveyor of my larder—the clerk of my kitchen! Well, well! I am at least as grateful to her for her sago, tapioca, and Welsh flannel, (of which you might have found wholesale pieces had you looked in the lumber-room below, when you and the nurse were smothering me up the other night,) as *she* to the memory of the husband who made her what she is, and whose portrait I have in pawn yonder in my bureau!"

The nurse now re-entered the room with her burthen; and having deposited the papers on a chair beside the bed, Basil dismissed her, in order that Abednego might examine them undisturbed by her presence.

"Shew me the minister who has a more voluminous correspondence on his hands than this!" cried the old man, pointing exultingly to the pile of papers.—"And pray, who paid the postage of all these letters?"

"*I* did, Sir; that is, I supplied the money to your servant."

"So, so!—you institute yourself my banker, then, as well as my *maitre d'hôtel* and groom of the chambers?—With all my heart!—I am always ready to accept services and comforts I have not to pay for, witness the tea and sugar of my Lady Winterfield! Look here!" he continued, pointing out, among the letters he was successively opening, several with seals that bore aristocratic emblazonments,—"Dukes, Marquises, Earls,—I have them all—*all* in my

train! I walk like a king at his coronation, with Howards, Percys, Plantagenets, in the wake of the contemned and trampled A. O.! Thriftless fools! some flattering, some cajoling, some threatening—as if any single word they could write or utter would influence me more than the winter's wind whistling through the crannies of my casement, unless indeed, the Open-Sesame called INTEREST! At twenty per cent., fifty per cent., a hundred per cent., I am willing to hear of their bonds and post-obits, their wants and distresses! But what care I for the executions in their houses, or the seizure of their family plate, or their wife's jewels! Here's a fellow writes to me," pursued Abednego, striking the open letter in his hand, "begging me to save the honour of his family mansion from the desecration of sheriffs' officers, and swearing he will not survive such a disgrace! Was it *I* who brought the disgrace upon him? Was it *I* who decoyed him to Crockford's? Was it *I* who induced him to hazard thousands,

night after night, at piquet, when he had not even hundreds at his disposal? *Don't* let him survive his disgrace! not the disgrace of bailiffs, but that of insolvency, brought upon himself by prodigality and vice! When he first applied to me for assistance, he informed me, in answer to my remonstrances, (much in the terms once used by a certain Mr. Basil Annesley,) that he came for money, not advice, that he wanted a Jew, and not a family chaplain!"

Basil was vexed to find himself colouring deeply at this allusion.

"And here," continued A. O., bringing forward a perfumed billet from among the wafered communications of attorneys and stockbrokers—ill-favoured epistles from Birchin Lane, Bartlett's Buildings, and Hart-street, Bloomsbury, "*here* is a dainty creature who wants me to oblige her with the loan of her own emeralds to appear at Windsor Castle! The guest of royalty, forsooth! yet writing in terms more abject

than I ever heard used by Bill the sweeper, to an old Money-lender! *More* delicate handwritings, 'Lucy Maitland?' Ay, ay! the old-china fancier! And here, Basil—here, Mr. Annesley, is the first application of one of your brother officers! My eye has been upon that boy these two months! I knew I should soon have him in my books—that is, *trying* to get into my books—for I have enough of the family affairs on my hands with those of his precious uncle."

"*Wilberton?*—is he in difficulties?" exclaimed Annesley, in a tone of regret.

"Why not?—He keeps the finest company, and has a taste for opera-dancers, (as costly an item for a boy in the Guards as Sevres and Dresden to his mother.) You needn't blush again—I did not say opera *singers*, Mr. Annesley. Trust to my delicacy to make no allusion in *your* presence to any such fragile commodities!"—

"I *do* trust to your delicacy never again to allude, with light mention, to the person at whom, though under so false a designa-

tion, you are aiming!" cried Basil, with warm indignation.

"Well, well,—no offence, no offence! Esther Verelst is, I dare say, no more fragile than her neighbours; though *that* implies no great things in the way of discretion.—'H. R.'—So! then, my Pericles of the day! the five thousand for which you pledged your public honour, and the title-deeds of an estate, in your family since they wheedled it out of the scurvy soul of James I., has not sufficed you? You must cut a figure as a giver of banquets, must you, as well as on the Treasury Bench? What is the joy of place, I marvel, unless its salary suffice to grease the wheels of office?—'The expenses of his very ostensible situation to be maintained!' he writes. Jackass! Because he chooses to have Rhenish wines and French *entreés* at his dinner, and to be a fop and a fribble as well as the first orator of the day, must he needs make false pretences to the Jews about 'the ex-

penses of his ostensible situation?' Excellent H. R.! though you date from Downing Street, you will not throw dust in the eyes of A. O.! Were you half the clever fellow the world believes you, your letter would contain three lines—'I want two thousand pounds,—can give landed security, and not more than twelve per cent.' *That* is coming to the point;—between knowing one and knowing one, the best statesmanship. I should have thought the experience of office might have taught him the futility of fine phrases,—mere loss of time to writer and reader! It is not by locking up brickbats in a plate-chest, Mr. Basil Annesley, that you can convert them into family plate."—

"I am afraid you will tire yourself, Sir," said Basil. "I would fain see you take some nourishment before I go. Let me call up the nurse, and lay aside the remainder of these papers till the afternoon; for I have only a few minutes more to be here."—

"No, no!—you must wait a bit!" cried

Abednego. "I have something to say to you. I have a present to make you."—

"I want no presents!" cried Basil, instantly rising, and preparing for departure. "I never accepted one in my life, save from kinsman or friend."

"From the former, I suspect, my poor Basil, your gifts have been scanty enough!" ejaculated Abednego, with a degree of familiarity that served only to aggravate the displeasure of his companion. "With respect to the latter, I flatter myself I have as good a title to the name as such flimsy things as Wilberton or Maitland."

"They are my brother officers,—*not* my friends!"—interrupted young Annesley.

"Then, how came you to accept from the latter the desk-seal, with which you daily close your letters?"—demanded Abednego, having thrown young Annesley completely off his guard, and enjoying his uncontrollable start of astonishment at this minuteness of information concerning his private affairs.

"But no matter! I will not force my benefactions upon you.—*I* do not deal in jasper desk-seals; and any day I choose, the Duca di San Catalda will give me a hundred ducats for the miniature I intended to throw away upon you.—Good morning!"

The attention of Basil Annesley was arrested by mere mention of the name of the Duca di San Catalda. He was eager for a pretext to sit down again, and await an opportunity of renewing the conversation.

"I forgot to tell you, Sir," said he, "that among the applicants for the loan of the house in Greek Street, is a picture-dealer who resides in that neighbourhood."

"Apropos to miniatures?"—demanded Abednego, fixing his shrewd eyes, with a cunning smile, upon the young man's face.

"Apropos to your own affairs!"—was the indignant rejoinder of Basil.

"As regards my own affairs, then, be so obliging as to inform my ragged footman,

pray, when you go down, that when Mr. Stubbs calls again——"

"You know him, then?"

"You told me his name, just now."

"I said a picture dealer in Soho. There are dozens upon dozens of such!"

"No matter! I know enough of the prying and intrusive dispositions of a certain Mr. Stubbs, to feel convinced that *he* is the man who, with the view of entering into personal communication with me on ANY subject, is likely to pretend a desire of becoming my tenant.—I desire none such!—He is a swindler and a liar. I will have none of him, I say again.—Let Bill inform the blackguard I will have none of him!"

"You need not address yourself so pointedly to *me*, my dear Sir!" said Basil, unable to repress a laugh. "*I* am not the advocate of Mr. Stubbs. You might pitch him out of yonder window before I should lift a hand in his behalf. I merely mentioned to you that the boy complains of his

coming here every morning between twelve and two, insisting upon seeing you on the subject of your house, conceiving you might be sorry to lose a good tenant."

"A good tenant in Mr. Jeremiah Stubbs! —But no matter!—He has no more real intention of engaging those premises, than you of bidding for Northumberland House! Besides, I am in no such torture about the lease of my house in Soho! I have half a dozen others standing empty,—one in Park-lane,—one in St. James's-square,—and I shall soon have one, I suspect, in Arlington-street; for, unless I am much mistaken, I shall be forced to make a crash at Lord Maitland's.—I have given him three years' law to redeem engagements, which I knew from the first to be thousands upon thousands beyond his power of redemption!"

"Lord Maitland!"—exclaimed Basil, aghast.

"Ay, Lord Maitland!—Why not, as well as another!"—

"But his unfortunate wife and daughters——"

"His wife is some degrees worse than unfortunate.—But that is *her* concern, and her husband's. As to their hopeful progeny, it is written that the sins of parents are to be visited on their children; and seldom were less deserving children exposed to ancestral retribution.—Like father, like son;—like mother, like daughters;—all empty-headed fools together! But that his lordship has been trying to defraud me of my just due, I should, however, have felt disposed to deal less harshly with him. But when I find a fellow profiting by his privilege of peerage to ——"

"Pardon me if I entreat you to give me no undue insight into the private affairs of my friends," interrupted Basil, again rising from his chair, on finding that they were straying further and further from the miniature.

"Ay, ay!—You are afraid of finding your

chains of gold mere pinchbeck. You want an excuse to your conscience for continuing to flirt with Lord Maitland's giddy daughters, to eat his pine-apples, and drink his claret,—though certain that by payment they are no more his than yours!" cried A. O., with a caustic sneer.—"What curious calculations might one make, after some royal or noble banquet, of the number and names of the persons at whose real expense the noble guests have been entertained!—Messrs. Grove, the fishmonger,—Giblett, the butcher,—Fisher, the poulterer,—Gunter, the confectioner,—Fortnum, the grocer,—Morel, the oilman,—Durand, the wine-merchant,—Garcia, the fruiterer!"

"You are at last making out a very tempting bill of fare, Sir," interrupted Basil, anxious to get away.—"I can discern a Barmecide's feast through this bare muster-roll of names."

"You are that filthy thing, a *gourmand*, then, as well as the slave of a pretty face?"

coolly demanded the old man.—"Well, well! God mend you!—In my time, young men were content with the vices of young men! Now-a-days, they monopolize the weaknesses of boyhood and senility,—reconciling all extremes,—the follies of beardless chins and graybeards!"

"I must again say Good morning, Sir, since you seem disposed to take me so severely to task," said Basil, abruptly.

"Before you go, however, I have a service to request of you," said Abednego, suddenly lowering his voice. "Don't be afraid!—I am not going to ask you for the *book* again. You have wisely put it into your pocket, and I honour your caution. All I have to request is, that you will break with your own hands the seals you prudently placed on yonder bureau.—Here is the key!" said he, producing one which Basil had already noticed under his pillow, when they effected the sick man's change of bed.

Having readily complied with Abednego's

desire, Annesley stood awaiting his further orders.

"Touch the head of the brass nail to the left of the last pigeon hole!" said Abednego, leaning on his elbow, and watching the proceedings of his delegate.

Basil Annesley did as he was required; when, lo! there started up, from the bottom of the old-fashioned bureau, a trap or hide, the well of which contained a variety of articles, apparently of less value than those which lay unguarded and exposed above.

"You will find a brown paper packet among those trinkets," said Abednego. "Take it out,—close the trap,—and see that the spring is secure! Then lock the bureau, and bring me the key and the parcel."

More amused than angry at the imperative tone in which those orders were conveyed, Basil obeyed.

In another minute, he had laid both upon the pillow; and was again taking his leave, when Abednego bade him wait a moment.

With trembling hands, the old man was proceeding to undo the packet.

" Can I assist you, Sir?" said Basil, conceiving that it was with this view Abednego had delayed his departure.

The old man answered not a word; though his hands trembled so exceedingly, that it was evident he would have some difficulty in accomplishing his purpose. There was a knot in the slight cord that tied up the packet.

" Better cut it!"—said Annesley, after a few minutes lost in infructuous attempts, and presenting a penknife from his pocket-book for that purpose.

" Waste not—want not!" murmured the old man, in a feeble voice; and, after another moment or two, Annesley perceived, to his utter amazement, that, in spite of Abednego's homely proverb, and deliberate parsimony, his feelings were so deeply involved in his task, that tears were actually falling upon the little parcel!

"*Again* thus agitated!"—thought Basil. "This must be the very weakness of disease! Twice in one day, for this iron man to evince tokens of sensibility!—Yet, *who* would believe me, were I to assert that I had seen tears shed by the stony eyes of A. O.!"

The packet was now open; but Abednego's hands had not ceased to tremble, or his tears to fall!

It contained only a miniature case; and Basil's heart began to beat strongly on recalling to mind the recent allusion of his host to such an object, in connexion with the Duca di San Catalda.

"Accept *this* from me!"—said the old man, placing it open in his hands.

And to the utter wonderment of Basil Annesley, he found, on opening the case, that it contained a beautiful enamel copy of Verelst's exquisite picture of the Esmeralda, —the female figure of which presenting a striking likeness of his beloved Esther!

The gift was indeed inestimable!—But by what strange series of coincidences was he indebted for such a treasure to the munificence of the Money-lender—A. O.?

CHAPTER IV.

The earth hath bubbles,—and he is of them.
SHAKSPEARE.

THOUGH the gift bestowed by Abednego upon young Annesley must, at all times, have been a most welcome one, it could not have chanced at a more auspicious moment than now, when, for the first time since the renewal of their acquaintance in England, he found himself banished from the presence of Esther Verelst. He was himself, moreover, on the eve of exile to an opposite quarter of the town; so that even chance encounters in the street were improbable;

the company of the Guards to which he belonged being under orders to march into the Tower the day following his acceptance of the miniature from Abednego.

These eastern quarters are rarely very inviting to the young men of fortune and family, of whom the Guards are composed; unless during the summer months, when they can prevail on their gay friends of the West End to steam it to the Tower, and breakfast with them, on pretence of viewing the lions of the place, and examining the interesting autographs cut in the walls of their mess-room, by Peveril of the Peak and other prisoners of note.

But it was just then peculiarly disagreeable to Basil to find himself moated up with Wilberton and Maitland, whose secrets had been accidentally placed in his keeping;—or even with Loftus and Blencowe, whose insight into his own, and want of delicacy in their railleries on the subject, he had more than once found occasion to resent.

There was no remedy, however. With so little to complain of in the hardships of his military duties, Basil Annesley was conscious that it would be absurd to murmur, as an evil, against a few weeks' banishment to a remote quarter of the town.

It happened, however, that within a few days of taking up his new quarters, he was attacked with indisposition, either the result of his exertion and attendance upon the Money-lender, or of the humid atmosphere of the Tower,—which amounts almost to mal' aria, and, at certain seasons of the year, is sure to engender a low fever in the garrison. In compassion to his illness, perhaps, the two favourite *raws* established for his persecution by his facetious friends, (his intimacy with the Verelsts and with A. O.,) were suffered to heal unmolested. There was not sufficient resource in the place to dispense with his aid for piquet, or whist; and the little mess-table was accordingly undisturbed by the bickerings too often pro-

duced elsewhere by the perpetual system of quizzing, in vogue in the Maitland set. Basil did not hear, above half a dozen times a-day, allusions to his midnight attempt to break into the house of the Westminster Jew, and only very remote hints of his passion for the arts.

Nevertheless, the first day he was able to shake off his indisposition so far as to visit the west end of the town, in spite of the bantering to which he had been subjected, one of his first visits was to Delahay-street. He was anxious to inquire after his patient, —he was anxious to inquire after his friend; yes, *his friend!*—for how could he otherwise estimate the man to whom he was indebted for the semblance of that beloved face which never quitted his bosom for a moment of the day or night? Abednego appeared, indeed, to have contemplated such an appropriation of the miniature; for it was set in a plain gold *fausse montre*, with a loop for suspension round the neck.

"I swear I am now nearly as ill myself," murmured Basil, as he drove along Great George-street, "as poor Abednego on the bitter night I brought him home here—an exploit which, I verily believe, was the cause of all my own indisposition!"

At the end of Delahay-street he got out, and proceeded on foot to the Money-lender's door.

So accustomed was he now to the untowardnesses of that rugged household, that he did not so much as expect any notice to be taken of his rap at the door for the first ten minutes.

To his great surprise, however, scarcely *two* were allowed to elapse before it was opened;—*not* by the rough-headed sweeper, —not by the rotund nurse; but by a stranger,—an old Jew in all the nursery force of the term,—of sinister countenance and squalid attire,—stooping shoulders,—rusty beard,—and the physiognomy of Barabbas!

Now that Basil was certified of the dis-

connexion of Abednego with the hated tribe to which his name appeared to proclaim him attached, he could not forbear being surprised and disgusted at his choosing to entertain so unsavoury an individual in his household.

"I wish to speak to Mr. Osalez," said he.

"You vish vat?" demanded the new porter, with an ungracious air.

"I want to speak to your master——"

"To the tevilsh wid your *mastersh*," retorted the Jew, about to close the door in his face.

"I have business with A. O.!" cried Basil, resolved to forestall the measure by adopting the phraseology of the place.

"Theresh no A. O. here now! The housh ish shold," replied the man. "The housh ish mine own;—bought wid mine lawful monish, and vat have you to shay againsht it?"

"Will you favour me with the present address of Mr. Osalez?—He was ill when I

left him a fortnight ago, and I am anxious to inquire after him."

"He may be ted now, for vat I or any one caresh!" retorted the Jew—now really fulfilling his intention, and slamming the door in the face of the troublesome intruder.

Gone!—vanished like a Will of the Wisp! Most provoking—most perplexing! Basil, who had despatched the book back to his mother on the day of his parting from Abednego, with only a few words of apology for the liberty he had taken in borrowing it from her room, had in the interim made up his mind to appeal strenuously to the sympathy of Abednego, for further information on a subject concerning which, at his present age, he felt himself entitled to explanation; and the unexpected disappearance of the old man was the heaviest disappointment he could have undergone.

Under a sudden impulse of irritation, instead of quitting the door which had been closed upon him, he knocked loudly.

"Vat ish your pleashure to make dis tevil's noish at my gatesh?" cried the angry new proprietor, instantly reopening it.

"My pleasure is to offer you a sovereign for tidings of the present residence of Mr. Osalez," cried Basil, following the axioms of A. O., and coming at once to the point.

The individual thus abruptly apostrophized, coolly jerked the proffered coin into the pocket of his dirty coat, and referred him to Abednego's former residence in Greek-street.

"Fool that I was, not to think of it myself!" muttered Basil; and away he hurried to drive off, like mad, towards Soho.

Arrived in Greek-street, however, his hopes were again frustrated. Scaffolding was established against the walls; and bricklayers and plasterers were at work. The house was let, it appeared, for twenty-one years; and the workmen knew not so much as the name of the former proprietor.

"I was in hopes they were going to refer

me back to Paulet-street," said Basil to himself, in the bitterness of his heart. "Nay, without their reference, I suppose it will end with my having to travel once more to St. Agnes le Clare. A better alternative, certainly, than advertising in the *Times* or *Hue-and-Cry* for the present abode of A. O.!"

In the excitement of feeling produced by his disappointment, he even determined on a personal inquiry at the door of Verelst, which he had promised himself never again to approach till recalled by the artist; and though he had the vexation of hearing, syllable by syllable, the same message delivered to him a fortnight before, that the young ladies were "out," and the painter and his wife "engaged," he had at least the comfort of finding that Mrs. Verelst was convalescent.

"The young ladies are well, I hope?" said he, turning away his face as he hazarded the inquiry.

"Quite well, Sir—that is, except Miss Esther, who has been poorly for some time," said the maid, in a confused manner.

"But you said she was *out!*"

"Yes, Sir—that is — Sir;—the family don't see no more company. I was ordered on no account to let nobody in," said the girl, still more embarrassed; and Basil, vexed as he was, having no further plea for inquiry, had only to express his regret at the young lady's indisposition and walk away.

He returned that day to the Tower in a mood of mind rendering it extremely fortunate that his companions received him on his arrival with yawns, rather than pleasantries. Maitland and Wilberton were growing too dull to have spirits for quizzing; and finding that he brought them no news from St. James's-street, they soon returned to the snooze before a roasting fire, from which his return had bestirred them.

Esther ill — Abednego vanished! — No means of inquiry after either! At his next

visit to the West End, Annesley hastened to pay his tardy compliments to Madame Branzini, as a channel by which he might at least gain intelligence of the former. But, alas! the Consul and his wife were gone down to Brighton for the remainder of the holidays.

By degrees the state of suspense to which Annesley was reduced, became too intolerable to be borne. In the dreary isolation of the Tower, he had nothing better to occupy his time, than to ponder over his perplexities; till he finally became so overmastered by his feelings, as to take the desperate resolution of applying to Wilberton and Maitland for information. He had every reason to infer that *they* at least must be cognizant of the Money-lender's removal; and at the risk of incurring their sneers, boldly inquired of them one night, as they were separating for bed, whether they could favour him with the present address of A. O.

Each looked at the other,—the one with

surprise—the other with indignation. Wilberton with his usual boisterous folly burst into a horse-laugh; but John Maitland accepted the question almost as an insult. He had not forgotten Basil's allusion to the Money-lender in Arlington-street, a day or two after A. O.'s awkward appearance on the scene; and felt convinced that Annesley must be fully aware of his family difficulties.

"You had better look in the Court Guide," said he;—"or in the Directory, under the head of Money-lender. Should these resources fail, I dare say the thief-takers of Bow-street can give you information concerning your friend."

Maitland had quitted the room before Basil recovered breath to reply. Resolved to carry out their mutual explanations on the morrow, when John Maitland's groundless anger would have subsided, he returned to the corner where he had been seated, and, more from listlessness than with any settled purpose, took up from the table the Court

Guide, which was lying beside the Annual Army List, (the two classics of London mess-rooms,) and turned to the letter O.

The patronymic of Osalez was too foreign to admit of much expectation of finding it there at all. Nevertheless, immediately preceding a long catalogue of O'Shaunessy's, there appeared the name of Osalez three times repeated:—

Osalez, Bernard, Esq., 14, Poland Street.

Osalez, R. Esq., 4, Abbey road, Regent's Park.

Osalez, A. Esq., 74, Bernard Street, Russell Square.

Now, though A. Osalez, Esq., might import Andrew, Augustus, Alfred, Allan,—or fifty other names,—Basil could not for the life of him but hope and believe that the auspicious initial stood for no other than "Abednego." There might be dilapidated houses to be bought, sold, or exchanged, in Bernard-street as well as elsewhere. At all events, he was determined that the morrow

should clear up his doubts; and, accordingly, at the very time he had previously promised himself to have a clearing up with Maitland, was approaching on foot the door of a substantial-looking house in Bernard-street, Russell Square.

"What a thrice double ass I must be," was his secret commentary on his own weakness, "to fancy that such a man as A. O. would allow his abode to become a matter of advertisement in Boyle's Court Guide."

The nearer he approached the house, the more he became assured of his folly. Not a vestige, in the comfortable, clean, and modern residence before him, of the tumble-down nature of A. O.'s habitual resorts,—not a token of occasion for a "repairing lease," in Bernard-street, Russell-square; not a brick discoloured,—not an atom of mortar displaced in the pointing. The door was varnished,—the knocker lustrous,—the steps bath-bricked into snowy whiteness without a speck under the scraper; and the A. Osalez

of the Court Guide would have become an old maid of independent fortune, in Basil's apprehension, but for the qualifying designation of "esquire."

"At all events, as I am utterly unknown in this quarter of the town, I can knock and make inquiry,"—cogitated Basil; and the summons having been answered by a grave-looking family butler, he was informed, in answer to his formal demand, that "Mr. Osalez was out."

"Has he not been recently indisposed," demanded young Annesley.

"My master, Sir, is just returned to town."

Recollecting Abednego's diatribe against the ruinous waste of pampered menials, and estimating the expenses (perquisites included) of so respectable-looking a gentleman as he had the honour of addressing at between two and three hundred per annum, Basil almost smiled at his own infatuation in persisting in his inquiries. He was duly

sensible of the impossibility of the Money-lender having affinity with the proprietor of an abode so comfortable, a servant so much its master.

"I called here for the purpose of inquiring after a relation of Mr. Osalez,"—hazarded Basil, by way of excuse to the butler for not leaving his card.

"I am not aware, Sir, that my master *has* any relations," replied the man, assuming an air of dignity and mistrust.—"I have been some years in his service, and never *heard* of any."

"In that case," said Basil,—"I am mistaken.—I understood that Mr. *Abednego* Osalez was connected with him."

"*My* master's name, Sir, is Abednego," replied the butler,—evidently growing impatient of so long an interrogatory on so cold a day,—the chilly breezes of which had already dislodged a portion of powder from his cauliflower head.

"At what hour is Mr. Osalez likely to be at home?"—inquired the overjoyed Basil.

"I really can't take upon me to say, Sir. His time of returning from the city is very uncertain."

Young Annesley longed to hazard an inquiry what especial business or calling took him habitually to the city; but destitute of pretext for such impertinent curiosity, he found nothing better to say than that he would call again,—nothing better to do than to slink away;—leaving the dignified butler of opinion that he had been summoned from his afternoon doze in the pantry (or more probably before the dining-room fire, with the *Morning Herald* in his hand by way of a screen) to very little purpose, and by a very suspicious young gentleman.

Meanwhile, scarcely had Basil reached the corner of the street, when there drove past him, at a brisk pace, a plain but handsome chariot, to which he should have scarcely

raised his eyes in Arlington-street; but which, in the neighbourhood of Russell square, assumed something of an aristocratic grace,—nay, as it glanced along, he caught a glimpse of a head within, which, but for the impossibility of such a transition,—he could have sworn to be that of A. O.

"The old man's face is running in my head,"—said he, vexed at his own folly: "and like Sir Thomas Browne, when writing upon quincunxes, I descry one in every object in nature.—Not an old-clothes-man passes me, but I fancy I can trace a resemblance to Abednego!—And now to be equally struck by the likeness of the proprietor of a pair of horses worth four hundred guineas, to a man who grudges himself a hackney coach!"

At that moment, however, he recalled to mind his collision with a similar carriage, when driving with Blencowe, opposite to Hatchett's, nearly a month before; and the

assertion of his companion that its solitary inmate was none other than the renowned A. O.

He had half a mind to return and verify the fact, but already, while pursuing his train of recollections, and trying to recall to mind whether he had actually seen the face of the Money-lender in the brown chariot, on the day in question, he had reached half way across Russell-square; and by the time he retraced his steps into Bernard-street, the carriage had disappeared.—He had not courage to re-confront the portly butler in order to ascertain whether in the interim it had deposited its inmate at the door of Mr. Osalez.

Moreover, he had a commission to execute for Wilberton at Lawrence's, concerning the progress of a new dressing-box, the building of which had only reached the second story, requiring him to be in Bond Street at a certain hour, to meet a workman who was to receive orders concerning the

admeasurement of the compartments; and there was no time to lose.

Still, the subject nearest his heart was not forgotten amid the perplexities of patent hinges, and the shades of green morocco or purple velvet;—and after taking a sandwich and glass of sherry at the Club, and asking every one in vain for news, to carry back to the ark from which he had been permitted to escape, he sent for Wilberton's cab, which he had promised to drive back to the Tower, and prepared for departure.

"Surely," argued Basil with himself, with singular disregard to metropolitan topography—"it would make little difference were I to drive round by Russell-square, and *so* along the City Road? I feel that I shall not sleep till I have cut through the heart of this perplexing mystery."

It is surprising how vaguely we admeasure distances, when they regard the legs

and horses of other people. Having convinced himself that he was taking *almost* the nearest way, by half-past five o'clock Basil was dashing along through the lighted streets, towards Bernard-street, Russell-square; and emboldened by a couple of glasses of sherry, he desired Wilberton's tiger to knock at the door before which he checked his horse, and inquire whether "Mr. Osalez were at home."

A footman in a plain livery now appeared to reinforce the butler; and who having answered in the affirmative, Basil had no alternative but to jump out and follow the servant, who was already preceding him to the drawing-room with the name he had received from the tiger, up the richly carpeted and well-lighted stairs. Basil's heart almost quailed, as he followed his pilot in this vague voyage of discovery. How was it *possible* that THIS could be the new abode of A. O.? All was as well established and

regular as if the proprietor were already a grandfather, succeeding, in virtue of inheritance, to a grandfather of his own.

The door of the drawing-room being now thrown open, and the name of "Mr. Annesley" articulately announced, there was no receding; and struck by the unusual gleam of light within, it occurred to Basil, that the rooms were prepared for a dinner-party, and that he passed with the servants for one of the guests!

Nor was he mistaken. On clearing the threshold, he perceived that half a dozen grave-looking gentlemen were assembled round the fire-place;—one or two seated in cozy arm-chairs,—one or two standing chatting together upon the hearth-rug. He would have given worlds to retreat! Never had he felt himself so complete an intruder! Not a face in the room,—all of which were turned towards him,—had he ever beheld in his life!

Nevertheless, the servants had now re-

tired, closing the door behind them; while he looked round in indescribable dismay, hoping to determine, from the attitude of the persons present, which of them was the master of the house, to whom his apologies were due. But a dead silence had followed the announcement of his name; and no one seemed more particularly surprised than the rest at his joining the party.

At length, this portion of the mystery was explained. A solemn-looking old gentleman with a high-narrow forehead, a pair of nankeen shorts and discoloured white silk stockings, many degrees inferior in external presentment to the butler, stepped graciously forward from the rug to the carpet, to announce to the confused young man,—that, "Mr. Osalez would make his appearance in a moment,—having had letters of importance to answer, after his return from the city."

Annesley bowed, and tried to be thankful. At all events, he judged that it would be better to await the coming of the master of

the house, and make apologies to him, than to hurry through explanations unintelligible and unimportant to the guests, and sneak off with the air of a detected pickpocket. He had time, therefore, to examine the apartment; which, though simply, was richly furnished; with two or three striking pictures, and two or three noble bronzes by way of ornament.

The conversation his arrival had interrupted was now resumed, though little to his advantage,—for not a syllable uttered by the five elderly gentlemen conveyed the smallest meaning to his ear! It was a mystery of which he did not possess the key;—being neither more nor less than the jargon of bankers and stock-brokers!

"Not daring to seat himself, he stood, hat in hand, awaiting the opening of the door, and wishing himself fifty fathom under the foundations of the White Tower, or anywhere else, rather than a drawing-room in Bernard Street, Russell Square.

Had there been women present, he would have felt less embarrassed; the tact and courtesy of the sex readily supplying excuses for the indiscretion of one of his age and appearance. But those five solemn old men in their knee-breeches and buckled shoes,—their white side curls or bald crowns,—amounted to the awful. He would as soon have interrupted a solemnization of the priests of Isis and Osiris in the Great Pyramid.

At length, a step approached the drawing-room door;—and though Basil's blood ran cold with nervousness, his cheeks glowed with blushes as the door opened, and the master of the house made his appearance!

"I have a thousand apologies to offer you, gentlemen," said a voice which yielded instant confirmation to the astounding conviction which a first glance had produced in the mind of Basil—"I have a thousand apologies to offer you!—a messenger from Downing-street was awaiting me on my re-

turn. I fear I have appeared very long. But dinner will be served in a moment."

Mr. Osalez now shook hands in turn with his elderly guests, addressing to each some distinguished word of compliment. When it came to the turn of Basil to be noticed, the young man's heart sank within him. He was prepared for a start of surprise—a sarcastic reproof! It did not occur to him that, his name having been already privately announced to his host by the servants, no surprise, at least, would be manifested. So far, however, from hearing the sarcasms he had anticipated, even his apologies were forestalled by the well-bred courtesy of Mr. Osalez.

"I rejoice to see you, my dear Annesley," said he. "You must leave it to *me* to apologize to my old friends here for your appearance among them in your morning dress. My invitation, I know, reached you too late this evening, to admit of your

dressing to join our party. You have shewn, indeed, far higher breeding than myself,—by preferring your own discomfort to keeping others waiting."

So perfect was the self-possession of A. O. while uttering this explanation, that Basil was for a moment really posed to determine whether he might not really have been invited, and the letter of invitation missed him.

"Believe me, I had not the smallest intention of intruding upon your party—" he was beginning; but Osalez stopped him short.

"I have sent away your cabriolet till eight o'clock," said he—"that hour will, I believe, admit of your returning in time to the Tower."

There was something so collected and so positive in the manner of his host, that Basil, seeing at once he was resolved to detain him, conceived that the best thing he could do for the furtherance of his own

objects, was to coincide in the decision of his extraordinary friend.

He had no leisure for deliberation, indeed, for at that moment dinner was announced; and on proceeding to the warm and comfortable dining-room, he saw that a seventh cover had been added to the richly-laid, round table.

Never had Basil felt more embarrassed than on taking his place!—Never had he felt more thoroughly out of place than with those grave-looking old men, and the mysterious host, who, by his composed manner of disposing of him, seemed to possess some preternatural influence over his destinies. But by degrees, the influence of light and warmth, capital wines, and an excellent dinner, exercised their genial influence on soul and body.

Basil had been accustomed to feast with the great. The tables of the Duke of Rochester and Lord Maitland, (of both of whom he had been of late a frequent guest,)

were cited by the world as uniting all that a *cordon bleu*, a first-rate French cook, Italian confectioner, and German *maître d'hôtel*, could produce in the way of *savoir vivre*.—But it struck him that he had never seen fish, flesh, and fowl, in such exquisite perfection as now; and it amused him not a little to hear the venerable gentlemen treat of such matters, not only with the intense *gusto* invariably attributed by old books to aldermen, (a proof among many others that we derive our civilization from the East,) but as though the city were the fountain-head of the good things of this world; and that Billingsgate, Smithfield, and Farringdon, despatched to the West End only their refuse produce, after dedicating the finest to the heavier purses of the aristocracy of Guildhall. He had not been accustomed in Arlington-street to hear turtle and venison treated of as things unknown, in perfection, on the Western side of Temple Bar!

But it was not the mere gastronomy of the dinner that warmed his heart. It was most edifying to see the grave faces of the six old gentlemen relax under the influence of that convivial atmosphere. Warmed by the stimulus of wine, such as never before had reached his lips, (the juice of the grape pure from the wine-press of the sunny South, mellowed only by the hand of Time, instead of the drugged and fiery decoctions to which messes and Clubs had habituated his palate!) they soon expanded into cheerfulness;—and he had occasion to note the difference between the man of intelligence and information unfolding his stores under such influence, and the empty noise produced by similar excitement upon his usual companions. You might as well have attempted to intoxicate an exciseman's gauge, as produce more than a certain effect on the well-seasoned brains of these good livers of half a century's experience! With *them*, the opener of the heart and mind served only to bring out,

with freer expression, their prodigious stores of knowledge of the world.

And what a world!—How illimitably did Basil's horizon expand as he listened. Hitherto his notions of "the world" might have been geographically defined as "bounded on the North by Marylebone,—on the South by Lambeth,—the East by St. Martin's Lane,—the West by Kensington Gardens." But he now heard America and China familiarly talked of as lying within the ring-fence of the kingdom of Mammon!—India seemed regarded as a home-farm by these old gentlemen; and the Spice Islands were their flower-garden! Their caravans were traversing the wilderness, like the private post of some lordly establishment. As to Europe,—poor, common-place, domestic Europe,—each of them had his courier galloping homewards from Petersburg, Vienna, Berlin, like Horse Guards' *estafettes*, trotting backwards and forwards to Hampton Court or Hounslow.—As to Paris, it was a toy—a

snuff-box that seemed to lie in their waistcoat pocket.

While these facts were gradually transpiring, not in the way of vaunt, but the course of conversation, Basil naturally expected that a triumphant glance of the eye from Abednego would furtively intimate to him—"Behold! these be the kings of whom I spake!—the Kings of Tarsus and Epirus, of Tyre and Sidon! These are the masterhands that move the wires of kingly puppets,—these are the mainsprings of aristocratic action,—these are they without whom privy-councils and parliaments might mouth and gibber in vain,—these are the veritable monarchs who make peace and war;—these are the potentates who created the independence of America, who rendered France a citizen kingdom, and would do as much for the British empire, had peer-ridden England the smallest taste for enfranchisement."

But not a look—not a word—not a syllable,—implied peculiar significance or under-

standing between himself and his host. He probably passed, to those elderly sovereigns, as some protégé to whom Osalez deigned to extend no more than the protecting notice of admitting him occasionally to his board; and each in succession took wine with him in the encouraging manner with which they would have patronised a school-boy at home for the holidays. But it was something that they refrained not from their usual discourse in mistrust of the presence of this one accidental stranger. Neither did they seek to find in him *more* than a listener; but continued to treat of kings and ministers in all quarters of the globe,—as so many implements for coining in the hands of those real masters of the world,—the money-mongers of its various exchanges.

It was interesting, however, to young Annesley to perceive that there was nothing of assumption or braggarty in their self-assertion. In the House of Commons, in the Clubs, at the convivial meetings of the

West End, he had been often disgusted by the tone of flippancy or bullying assumed whenever the deferences of life were laid aside. But here, all was decorous as in the Upper House, with the bench of Bishops and the woolsack as dead weights upon the buoyancy of human nature.

With the magnanimous exercise of power, like the quiet lifting of an elephant's trunk to sport with the child it might, if angered, encoil and crush, these great financial operators, whose electric wires communicated from one end of the world to the other, would as soon have thought of jesting over the bankruptcy of kingdoms, or the necessities of princes, of which they were treating,—as the Home Department would think of perpetrating a pun over a death warrant!

Still less, however, were they grave or pompous; and many an amusing anecdote transpired connected with the statesmen or measures of the day, which might have told less well elsewhere; but derived peculiar

charm from the authenticity certified by the *genius loci.*

For Annesley was beginning to understand with whom he was dipping in the dish.—The names by which he heard his companions mutually addressed, were those he knew to be attached to loans and other gigantic financial operations, and saw announced by the papers as having audiences of the Chancellor of the Exchequer;—men whose signatures, inscribed on a sheet of paper, create a railroad that is to facilitate the intercommunication of kingdoms,—an Argentine Republic,—a county hospital, or an insurrection in Cochin China!

Over a dessert, the forced fruit, lime-ice, and Chateau Laffitte of which would have caused the Duke of Rochester's eyes to glisten, the host and his most potent, grave, and reverend Signiors of guests, sat gossiping of the State affairs of the world, as though their little synod constituted the privy council of the universe. They talked

of the politics of Europe as men talk of the tactics of a game of chess, over which they have the disposal;—of sovereigns, as if in their degree the ivory or ebony or box-wood pieces of the board. The identity of such privileged portions of human nature was evidently unimportant to their calculations. There was no Nicholas,—no Francis,—no Frederick William to the high-priest of Mammon; but in their places—Prussia, Hardenberg and Co.,—Austria, Metternich and Co.,—Russia, Nesselrode.

Of money itself, under the august name of CAPITAL, they treated as he had never heard it treated before,—as an end and not a mean;—and millions sounded in their mouths less than the pennies, or even the pounds, he was accustomed to hear betted elsewhere. In the arguments of that singular coterie, there was matter to drive thrice as many Political Economists to distraction!

In the midst of the discussion, young

Annesley could not forbear reverting with a degree of amazement, amounting almost to the ludicrous, to the sense of compassion with which he had, so short a time before, accosted the old beggar-man of Paulet-street; and the terrors with which, in his necessity for a paltry loan of three hundred pounds, he had undergone his cross-examination in Greek-street, Soho, in presence of the redoubtable A. O. !

CHAPTER V.

Oh! my weary hours
In my old cell! And yet the fruit thereof
Laughs in the shining, open face of day,
As laughs the dial, moved by clacking wheels,
And sober pullies, hidden from our eyes.

BLACKMORE.

THE pleasantries with which Basil Annesley had been of late persecuted by his brother officers concerning his unaccountable intimacy with and predilection for the notorious Money-lender, would unquestionably have been renewed on the evening of the day in question, could they have surmised the series of strange events which brought him back flushed and agitated to

the Tower, a few seconds before the expiration of the garrison hour.

But he offered no explanations; and having two or three important pieces of political news to communicate, (acquired among the prophets of the Stock Exchange,) besides an anecdote of the Dowager Colonel's having fallen on his nose behind the scenes of one of the theatres, to the displacement of his hat, wig, and proboscis, —they let him off without much severity of cross-examination, and scarcely a single reproach.

It was not till alone, and in the silence of the night, that Basil began to inquire of himself whether all that had of late befallen him, were not the unreal mockery of a dream;—whether there really existed either an Abednego the Money-lender, or a high-bred and luxurious banker or stock-broker, or bill-broker, named Osalez.

Perplexed by his reflections and fevered by unusual excess, he was unable to close

his eyes; or if he closed them for a moment it was to be further derided and perplexed by the confused dreams of indigestion; wherein his mother and Esther were intermingled with the dying man in the old attic in Westminster, and the Jew usurer who had relieved his pecuniary difficulties and bestowed upon him the richest treasure in his possession.

Nor did the morning sun bring its usual comfort and enlightenment.—The more he reflected on these mysteries, the more they appeared to darken.—He had lost all confidence in his own powers of perception,—in his own powers of volition.—This strange man,—this *ignis fatuus*,—this Djinn,—this mysterious influence,—appeared to enfold his destinies as with the coil of a boa-constrictor, and the capability of crushing him at will;—and under this persuasion, endured in solitary irritation day after day, the health of Basil, which had been almost re-established, again began to give way.

He was soon confined to his room,—wanting either power or inclination to cross the drawbridge: nor was this any source of regret to him.—Denied access to the house of Verelst—too proud to seek it again to that of a man whom he now recognised as rich and powerful, and on whom he had the claim of benefits conferred,—he had not the smallest inclination to quit his retirement.

It was a severe season. Though the spring was approaching, a six weeks' frost filled the clubs of St. James's-street with hunting men, and augmented the wisdom and divisions of Parliament with the number of its county members. Yet Basil was perfectly satisfied to remain, day after day, in his quarters. To beguile his *ennui*, he took opportunity to renew, as Esther had often entreated him, his study of the German language, which, since his departure from Heidelberg, he had suffered to grow rusty. For he had been struck, at his

dinner in Bernard-street, with the advantage which those puissant old men seemed to derive from their familiarity with modern languages. French, Italian, German, were familiar to them as English; (a circumstance strongly indicative of their own foreign origin;) and they appeared to verify the axiom of Charles V., that, "so many languages as a man possesses, so many times is he a man."

It was in vain his brother officers reviled him by the name of "sap," and protested that Nancy was going to advertise for a place as finishing governess. He adhered to his seclusion, and submitted to be thought a bore, rather than join in pleasures for which he had lost all inclination.

The insight he had incidentally obtained from A. O. into the prospects of Wilberton and John Maitland, rendered it doubly disagreeable to him to see them indulging in habits of expense unsuited to their means; and, as they refused to listen to his

remonstrances, and at once replied to them with repartees concerning the views and principles he was contracting among his Jewish associates, which he was compelled to silence by a serious explanation, there was nothing for it but to adhere to his own pursuits, and pass for a churl.

Meanwhile, fatal confirmation was yielded to the predictions of his mysterious friend, by an announcement which, some weeks afterwards, appeared in the morning papers, that—

"The Duke of Rochester, having broken up his establishment at Rochester House and Wilberton Castle, was about to proceed to Italy, where his Grace's family intended to reside for a period of some years."

The news produced considerable emotion in the fashionable circles;—not, indeed, the expatriation of the Duke and Duchess of Rochester, for whom, personally, people cared no more than for any other hospitable duke and duchess. But the loss of Roches-

ter House and Wilberton Castle was a serious injury to those innumerable butterfly friends who had found, in his Grace's rent-roll of fifty thousand per annum, a gratuitous source of enjoyment.

As Abednego had judiciously observed to Basil, during his attendance in Delahay Street, it was no wonder that so *very* popular a man should become a bankrupt; since, to ensure what is *called* popularity to a duke with fifty thousand a year, it is absolutely indispensable that he should expend a hundred thousand.

In a society so limited as that in which Basil was living, and which included also one between whom and the dukedom of Rochester there interposed only a couple of lives, such an occasion as this public announcement could not fail to produce frequent and most disagreeable reference to Jews and money-lenders; or, still oftener, and still more disagreeably, a sudden cessation of such references, in compliment to his pre-

sence. It was not, indeed, for young Annesley to become the advocate of Abednego, or take up the line of argument in his defence which the Money-lender had himself assumed in treating of the extravagance of the Rochesters ;—nay, since he had become so strangely an eye-witness of the wealth and transformations of this mysterious individual, mistrust was beginning to diminish even his own partiality. Still, he experienced sufficient gratitude and sufficient interest in his favour, to feel the deepest regret at finding him exposed to general obloquy.

The premature newspaper announcement of the Duke of Rochester's intended departure produced, of course, the measure it purported to prognosticate. Beset by claimants, who, so long as his credit laboured only under an *imputation* of "done up," had refrained from molesting him, in the hope of tempting him to add a few hundreds, or thousands, to the amount of de-

mands they were certain of establishing, with legal interest, against his estate, his Grace was now compelled to bid a precipitate adieu to the London world, which shines upon us, like the moon, only so long as the sun of our prosperity reflects brightness upon its face; and the original inauthentic announcement of his Grace's intended departure, was shortly followed up by an authentic auctioneer's advertisement, setting forth, in periods uniting the sesquipedalian pomposity of Johnson with the efflorescence of Hafiz and a whole column of the *Morning Post*, the details of a sale of the effects of "a distinguished nobleman recently removed to the Continent."

Rochester House, Wilberton Castle, and their heir-looms, were, of course, inviolable; but the furniture of the former, including an unique collection of articles of *virtù*, had been seized by the creditors, and was now on view; described, for the gratification of vulgar curiosity, in advertisements and ca-

talogues, with a waste of pomp, circumstance, and ignorant diffuseness, serving to prove that what is called the public must have a prodigious portion of leisure to read and stare.

One morning, about a fortnight previous to the expiration of his service at the Tower, a fine morning towards the close of March, which might have been mistaken for a sunny April day, tempted Basil Annesley and Maitland to boat it to the West End, where the chief interest and object of the former consisted in obtaining a glimpse of the house where Esther resided,—occasionally leaving a card at the door, with inquiries after the health of the family,—in order to prove that, if excluded from their society, he had not become unmindful of their welfare.

Having fulfilled this chivalrous duty, while Maitland proceeded to Arlington-street in search of letters, (the family of Lord Maitland having profited by his being

quartered at the Tower to refresh themselves for the London season by a few weeks sojourn at Brighton,) they met again at the club, and found that they had still an idle hour to dispose of. Tennis presented itself as the readiest resource; but, on hastening to the court, it proved to be engaged for the remainder of the morning; and, in order to get rid of themselves on the easiest terms, Maitland proposed that they should saunter into Rochester House, which was open to public view, preparatory to the sale of the furniture.

A crowd of carriages of course obstructed the court-yard; for if, as La Rochefoucault assures us, there is something in the sight of the disasters of our friend which is not unpleasing to us, the fact is never more strongly exemplified than in the haste with which London idlers scamper to a peremptory sale of the effects of some fashionable bankrupt, at whose expense they have been long entertained.

The rooms were crowded, even to suffocation; almost as crowded and almost as suffocating as for the assemblies and balls of the "popular" Duchess of Rochester; and Maitland and Annesley, who had only a short time to allot to their visit, began to fear that they should be detained at the head of the stairs till their hour was expired.

Just, however, as Maitland was expressing this opinion to his companion, Basil found himself plucked by the sleeve by one of the auctioneer's men in charge of the furniture, who had mounted guard behind the marble pedestal of a magnificent bronze figure of Mercury, brandishing a candelabrum for a caduceus, which stood in the lobby.

"Shlip in behind here, Shir," said the man, "and I'll show ye a crosh-cut into the mushic room, that'll get ye shafe through the crowdsh."

And suiting the action to the word, the man opened a small door in the wall behind

him, leading into a small passage; to mask the entrance of which, the placing of the niche and statue had probably been devised.

"Another Jewish friend of yours, eh, Nan?" cried Maitland, when, at the end of the small and deserted corridor in question, they found themselves, by passing another masked door opening behind a chamber organ, in the music room; and while Basil attempted to laugh off the favour shewn him, which he was as much at a loss to explain as Maitland himself, the men in charge of the rooms, conceiving by the privilege they enjoyed, that the two intruders *must* be personages of signal mark and distinction, began to overwhelm them with such obsequiousness of service that they were glad to escape into the adjoining picture-gallery.

"By Jove! there's Lady Winterfield coquetting it with the young Marquis, in the prettiest French bonnet I ever saw!" cried Maitland, with as little interest in the master-pieces contained in the gallery, as he had formerly

experienced when visiting the spot as the guest of the Duke of Rochester. "Come along, Nan, and let us interrupt the courtship!—It will be famous fun!"

Basil, however, was firmly rooted to the examination of the pictures.

"We may never have occasion to see these *chef d'œuvres* again!" said he.

"If we don't, what the deuce signifies? But we *shall* see them again. Some fool or other of our acquaintance will be sure to buy the best of them! So, there's a good fellow—come!"

But in spite of all his persuasions Annesley remained immovable. Among the pictures were three or four that claimed his earnest and startled attention, from the singular fact of having seen them in progress on the easel of Verelst!

Above all, there was a pair of battle-pieces which could only have been very recently purchased by the unthrifty duke or finished by the needy artist; for one of them

contained the identical design of the broken bridge, (though the figures were portrayed in costumes of the middle ages,) of which he had watched the original design start to life under the pencil of Verelst!

With eager interest, he instantly referred to the catalogue; and, to his surprise and indignation, found each of the pictures in question assigned to some ancient master! The pair in question was boldly attributed to no less a hand than that of Salvator Rosa!

"Infamous!" burst involuntarily from his lips, and he was about to disclose to his companion the grounds of his indignation as a further instance of the often-reviled impositions of auctions and auctioneers, when Maitland impelled him forward for the amiable purpose of frustrating Lady Winterfield's flirtation.

To return to the charge, or even to return to the picture, was out of the question.—They were now inextricably involved in the vortex of fashionable sight-seers, and com-

pelled to add their confirmation to the luminous truism which had a hundred times escaped hundreds of lips, in that gallery that very day: i. e., "What a horrible crowd!"

A little reflection determined Basil to postpone, till the morrow, a more deliberate verification of the imposture of which he was himself convinced; and he consequently acceded to Maitland's request when, having reached the end of the gallery without exciting the slightest token of vexation on the part of the fashionable widow, he proposed that they should escape from the throng they had been surveying in lieu of the articles of *virtù* forming their ostensible attraction to the spot, and make the best of their way home to dinner, while time and tide permitted.

"What a devil of a show up!" was the amiable apostrophe of Maitland, on quitting the court-yard. "I'm sorry for Rochester, because he was really a deuced good fellow. He regularly mounted me for six weeks last

hunting season, when I went down to the castle with Wilberton—ay, and capitally too! Milton couldn't have done it better. And then, he plays the best game of piquet in England—that is, the best or nearly the best! I'm really deuced sorry for him."

"I am still more sorry for his family," observed Basil. "His family are growing up; and it is a hard thing for his daughters."

"Ay!—They have your friend A. O. to thank, I suspect, for this disgusting publicity of the sale."—

"It is not the *sale* for which I pity them, but the occasion of it," observed Basil.

"It wouldn't much surprise me if there were the same sort of crash at *our* house one fine day or other," resumed Maitland, pursuing as if half unconsciously his own train of reflections!—"I've good reason to know that my father is cursedly dipped; and he wont give up Newmarket!—Let what will happen, he wont give up Newmarket!—A devil of a look-out for *me*,—

and worse still for the younger children. I've gone as far as my conscience or my lawyer's (and I don't know which is blackest!) would let me, in cutting off the entail; and though the governor and my mother have been badgering me these three months to sanction another mortgage, so as to enable them to keep up the war, at least till my sisters are married, my duty to those that come after me (eh?—that's the right text, isn't it, for the No-go of an heir-apparent?) wont allow me to make ducks and drakes of the last few acres of the family property."

Basil Annesley, feeling that his companion was excited by the scene which they had just quitted into somewhat indiscreet revelations, now attempted to turn the conversation;—no difficult matter with John Maitland,—whose attention,—even when matters so serious were concerned as the ruin of his family—was only too easily distracted. The transition from the heated

atmosphere of Rochester House to the stirring breezes of the river, soon dispersed every shade of reflection from his countenance.

It was some days before Basil Annesley's course of regimental duty admitted of his revisiting the West End; and a whole week elapsed before he was sufficiently master of his time to return to Rochester House.—Even then, he had some difficulty in accomplishing his object. But there was not a moment to be lost.—The sale had been several days in progress; and on arriving at the door, he found that the pictures concerning which he was so deeply interested, were included in the allotment of that very day.

No carriages *now* encumbered the court-yard. There were a few led horses and grooms of the sort always to be seen near the Houses of Parliament about six o'clock, —and an odd-looking gig or two. But the greater portion of the court-yard was

encumbered with carts, trucks, and hand-barrows, removing articles of furniture sold the preceding day.

The sale of the pictures was proceeding in the gallery itself; and while still in the vestibule, Basil could distinctly hear the sonorous and defying voice of Hummins the auctioneer, and the strokes of his hammer,—duly succeeded by the loud clamour of the crowded assembly on the adjudgment of succeeding lots.

Basil cast an anxious glance round the assemblage.—If the truth must be told, he was horribly afraid of descrying among them the face now familiar to him through its varied disguises; either in the squalid array of a Jew broker, or stationed, polished and gentlemanly, among the noted connoisseurs of the day; most of whom, glass in hand or spectacles on nose, were present, busied either in detecting blemishes in the works of art, or pointing out errors of description in the Catalogue, with a view to cheapening the

pictures for which they intended to become competitors:—sallow dukes, whose galleries were already stocked to overflowing,—*parvenu* millionaires, buying their way to worldly distinction,—country baronets, who regarded a fashionable auction as an indispensable ingredient to their season in London,—a few real amateurs, ever on the field to profit by the ignorance of others, and purchase a *chef d'œuvre*, when occasion presented itself, at the cost of a copy,—a still more limited number on the watch to purchase objects too high in value, of general competition, as a safe investment for capital;—and, in the proportion of ten to one to all these,—the usual rabble of an auction-room,—picture-dealers, brokers, Jews, pick-pockets, with an auxiliary force of unmeaning idlers, to increase the heat and confusion of the scene.

Two of Verelst's pictures had been disposed of before Basil Annesley entered the gallery; and, as far as he could understand

from the dealers around him, at high prices; the one as a Baroccia, the other as an Annibal Carracci, to a gentleman who, having recently inherited an enormous fortune, was making himself master of pictures, race-horses, and public contumely, at the cost of twenty thousand a-year!

The battle-pieces were just about to be put up; and Basil felt miserably nervous at the idea of hearing described as "matchless works of art," and perhaps sold at the price of such, creations which the poor living artist had drudged to produce for the remuneration of sign-painting!

Nor was he deceived.—The auctioneer seemed disposed to exceed himself in his premonitory flourish concerning these "gems of art,"—the pride of the Rochester collection!

"The possession from which the noble owner had torn himself with the deepest regret in quitting England," he said, "was the well-known picture gallery which he had

formed with so much pains, judgment, and cost, and which it was a scandal to the country that Parliament had not purchased *en masse* for the National Gallery. But of all his Grace's valuable, or rather *in*valuable pictures, it was well known that the accomplished and discriminating duke prized none more highly than his pair of Salvators!"

A few of the more discerning amateurs answered to this exordium with a grunt; unwilling to hazard further depreciation, in order that the moneyed ignoramuses might throw away their capital on pictures secure from *their* wiser competition so as to leave them without means for the prizes; and when the flowery auctioneer pointedly addressed himself to a nobleman distinguished among cognoscenti, to place the upset price of these "matchless Salvators," without receiving any encouragement in return for the liberty, it was a strange voice from a distant part of the assembly that boldly named one hundred and twenty pounds.

The auctioneer affected indignation, and inquired whether he were "indeed selling one of the most celebrated collections in the wealthy capital of the most enlightened country in the world?"—upon which piece of John Bull-ish clap-trap, a country baronet, touched to the quick of his patriotism, added five sovereigns to the bid, which a Jew broker in the pay of the auctioneer, instantly converted into guineas.

The strange voice from the other extremity of the room, now bid one hundred and thirty-five pounds for the pair; and by a dexterous compliment to the spirit and discernment of the country Baronet, this was soon raised by Hummins to one hundred and forty pounds. A competition thus established, the bidding went on briskly, and more briskly still; till at length the incomparable Salvators were on the point of being knocked down to the proprietor of a hundred thousand pounds'-worth of copies

and broken-down racers, for two hundred and seventy-five guineas.

"Two hundred and eighty!" cried a voice from that portion of the crowd most encumbered with dealers and brokers; and after some further sparring, the amount of about twenty guineas, the unseen competitor was declared victor.

The auctioneer looked surprised, or, to borrow an expressive Americanism,—consternated. He had done his utmost to spur on the *nouveau riche* to a further bid, but to no purpose. He was not to be bullied or cajoled a guinea further.

It is probable, by the way, that the proprietor of that "winged voice," though invisible to others, as the cuckoo to an unpractised eye, was perfectly known to Hummins; for the auctioneers of London are as notoriously cognizant of the *names* and natures of the apparent strangers who frequent their sales, as a shepherd individualizing every sheep in his flock.

Having witnessed all he wished to see, Basil was about to quit the gallery, desirous only to certify further the name of the rash purchaser. Having reached a table at the further end of the gallery, on which, in the midst of the greatest noise and confusion, a clerk was making entries, he interrupted his labours for a moment to inquire the name of the gentleman to whom the lot 347 had been knocked down.

"Do you wish to purchase, Sir?"—said the clerk, without raising his eyes from the paper. "Here, Nathan!—Nathan Herz!—a gentleman who wants to speak to you about the Salvators."

A shabby-looking individual, who was now pressing forward among the bidders in the sale that was again proceeding, turned round at this apostrophe, exclaiming, "A shentleman vantsh to purshash?"—when Basil was inexpressibly startled on recognising in this man, who was simply one of the Jew brokers assembled together in a

knot at that end of the room, at once the individual who, on a former occasion, had forwarded Maitland and himself through the private door into the music-room,—and the bearded Levite whom he had found in possession of the house in Delahay-street, Westminster, the former residence of A. O.!

"I have something to say to you in private about those Salvators," said Basil, half unwilling to address so uninviting a personage, and lowering his voice so as to be unheard by the clerk.

"Dey are not for shale, ma tear," replied the Jew, evidently desirous to escape the interview.

"I do not want to buy them. They have been put up under a false description."

"Yesh, yesh—no mattersh—I ashk no questions," persisted the Jew, struggling with the crowd to get away.

"But since I am able to inform you——" Basil was beginning.

"You can tell noshing, I promish, ma

tear young shentlemans, but I don't know better nor yourself!"—replied the broker. And before Annesley had time for a rejoinder, the fellow had disappeared.

"After all, what plea have I for moving in the business?"—argued Basil with himself, as, disappointed, heated, and excited, he drove back through the city to the Tower. "The better way will be to write to Verelst, and inform him of the exact state of the case, leaving him to act as he thinks proper. Shut up in his studio as he is, from one month's end to the other, the public disposal of these pictures will never reach his ears. Besides, my letter may perhaps serve as a renewal of intercourse with the family."

On arriving at home, and before he had time to fulfil or even confirm his purpose, a note was placed in his hands by his servant; sealed with an antique, and having the look of a fashionable invitation; yet, but for the elegance of its form, Basil would have pro-

nounced the handwriting to be that of the Money-lender.

On tearing open the envelope, he found simply the following lines :—

" Take no further concern about the pictures!—I know all: and purchased them only to expose the villany of a knave, and weakness of a fool.

" Yours, A. O."

So great was the astonishment of Basil Annesley, that he all but allowed the letter to fall from his hands! It seemed to him as if he had only that instant quitted the sale! He had given intimation of his intentions to no human being. Yet already, the omnipresent Osalez had found means to penetrate his views, and to be beforehand with his warning! *He*, then, was the purchaser of the pictures;—*he* who, from his intimate knowledge of the condition of Verelst and his family, must have been fully aware

of their unauthenticity; *he* who, from his gift to Basil of a copy of the Esmeralda, had probably employed the poor painter, as a patron!

Recalling to mind the exquisite nature of the works of art he had seen in Bernard-street, Basil could not suppose that the description contained in an auctioneer's catalogue had for a moment influenced the choice of so critical a judge as A. O.; and at that moment a mortifying suspicion glanced into his mind. Abednego was evidently, in some way or other, in furtherance of some of his petty projects, either in confederacy with, or in authority over, the Jew broker he had seen in possession of the tenement in Delahay-street; and Annesley knew him to have been mainly instrumental in promoting the ruin and break-up of the Duke of Rochester, —first, by his usurious loans, and lastly by his rapacious persecutions. What if he had been the means of selling these pictures to

the would-be connoisseur!"—and was *therefore* eager to get them once more into his possession.

Indignant at the suspicion, or rather, indignant with himself for having conceived it, Basil resolved to reply by a few lines which he intended to leave in person in Bernard-street; acquainting Mr. Osalez of his resolution to enlighten the mind of Verelst upon a point so essential to his interests as the speculations founded by the picture-dealers upon his imitations of the Ancient Masters.

The following morning, after breakfast, he was quitting the mess-room for the purpose of addressing Verelst, when Maitland, who was sunning himself,—gathered up into the wide window-seat to peruse his favourite *Morning Post*,—suddenly exclaimed,—

"Hillo, hillo!—you were at the sale yesterday, at Rochester House, weren't you, Nan?"

"Only for a short time."

"And what was your sapient opinion of the pair of Salvators?"

"That they were very fine pictures."

"Come, come!—no hedging!—I mean, did you consider them originals?"

Basil's colour rose to his temples at the inquiry.

"Because, if you did, my fine fellow,"—resumed Maitland, unable to contain himself when bursting with so grand a secret, "you were among the knowing ones who appear to have been deucedly taken in!—Look here!—Here's a letter from Hummins the auctioneer, apologising for having been made instrumental to an imposition on the public; and stating that the pair of battle pieces, forming part of the gallery of his Grace the Duke of Rochester, and yesterday sold as such for the sum of 310 guineas, are the original productions of a German artist of the name of Verelst, whose works are beginning to acquire considerable value in the trade; and furthermore, that they were

purchased as originals by his Grace the Duke of Rochester, for the sum of fifteen hundred guineas, from a picture-dealer of the name of Stubbs, residing in Frith-street, Soho.

"Then follows a flourish about Hummins' value for his own reputation, his conscientious discharge of his duties to the public, and so forth.—There!—Read it yourself!—Your *protégé's* fortune is made, it seems. I shouldn't be surprised to find that you bribed Hummins to oversell the pictures, and paid for the advertisement! Unless I am much mistaken, Stubbs is the name of one of the ruin-mongers who make a fool of my mother.—The very brute, by the way, who brought no end of annoyances on the family, by endorsing over one of my father's acceptances (to pay for the carved furniture of that accursed suite of *moyen age* rooms at Maitland Park, which I never enter without feeling as if I should

catch the plague!) to your Jewish friend Barabbas—the extortioner A. O.!"

Luckily, this taunt was unheard. Basil was now thoroughly absorbed in the perusal of Hummins' letter, the paper containing which had been handed to him by John Maitland; and, having made himself master of the contents, he pursued his original design, and quitted the room.

Little had he expected, after his long and regretted alienation from the Verelsts, to prove the means of a discovery likely to produce so advantageous a change in their fortunes. Never had Basil felt so happy. It was a balmy April day; and he ascended with gladsome steps the stone bastion overlooking the river, fancying that he had never before beheld its usually dingy current ripple so gaily in the sun!

The spring was rapidly advancing; and even for those denizens of London who do not divide the year into three months of

season and nine months of blank, the town was beginning to wear a pleasant aspect. Flower-carts and water-carts, jogging side by side through the streets, conveyed to the smoke-dried citizens an idea that, somewhere or other, the sun was shining, and the sky, so murky over their heads, exhibiting the cerulean hue of the poets; and, by degrees, the sickly roots of primroses, hawked about by flower-girls, whose faces bore direful superficial indication of the fact that flesh is dust,—gave place to bunches of faded lilacs, destined to be transferred, in broken water-jugs, to the window-ledges of all the by-ways of the metropolis, as too potent of scent to be borne within.

Even on the weed that clings with pendant streamers to the fœtid depths of a deserted well, once, at least, in the day, the vertical sun sheds its reviving light; and even into the most dismal lodging of the least cheerful capital in Europe, summer

infuses, for a moment, its cheering influence!

The Verelsts were happier now than in the trying winter season. The invalid could be wheeled to the window for change of air: and the girls, when proceeding to give their daily lessons, were less exposed to vicissitudes of weather.

But they had other causes for gladness. The more advantageous bargains made by Verelst, under the management and protection of Basil Annesley, were beginning to bring forth their fruits. They were getting, in some degree, above the world; and the comfort of seeing her family better clothed, better fed, and without fear for the morrow, had done more to restore strength and courage to Mrs. Verelst, than all the previous advice and medicaments of the physicians.

Moreover, there was prospect of improvement for the little household. Placed at ease by the payment of his military sketches,

the artist had ventured to give once more the reins to his imagination in the completion of a picture representing the Johanna von Orleans of Schiller bidding adieu to her native valley, which had been admitted, among cart-loads of works of art more or less deserving, to the honour of the Exhibition. For the twentieth time in his life, therefore, the artist was smoothing the plumage of a new-fledged Hope,—a bird of promise which, like the Phœnix, has the faculty of giving birth from its ashes to a successor fresh and fair as the one of recent extinction.

The girls, meanwhile, had been objects of unusual solicitude to the good Branzinis; who, the longer they were acquainted with the gentle dispositions of the accomplished governess of their children, became more and more convinced of the high distinctions of the humble family, and delighted in every occasion of brightening their joyless existence.

Still, these music-parties,—these operas,—these cheerful little dinners,—though accepted with gratitude by Mrs. Verelst for her daughters, were far from affording pleasure to Esther and Salome, now that there was no longer a chance of meeting Basil Annesley!

To *them*, his disappearance from among them was fraught with mystery. They knew nothing of his being quartered in the Tower; they knew nothing of their father's letter, or interdictions; and though accidentally apprised that their former friend appeared, from time to time, at the door, with inquiries after the health of their mother, this total change in their habits of intercourse increased rather than diminished their surprise. Salome's frank expressions of regret at his absence had produced from her parents the most chilling reproof; and ever since, by tacit consent of all parties, the subject was dropped.

The lodgings inhabited by the Verelsts were of such circumscribed dimensions, that

the two girls slept in a small room within that of their mother, upon whom they took it in turns to attend, by day and night; so that there was no opportunity for those sisterly confidences which, in more splendid households, are the origin of such wanton waste of time and sensibility. Nevertheless, Esther sometimes found a moment to whisper to Salome that it was strange Basil should so suddenly have withdrawn his interest from them; just as occasionally Salome found means to express to Esther her wonderment whether it would ever enter into her father's plans to return to Germany; and whether, even if they went back to their beloved Heidelberg, they might not find the Count von Ehrenstein a happy husband and father; and satisfied that, by the gift of Albert Durer's sketch-book to his old master, he had dissevered all ties of gratitude or affection with the family once so dear to him. Each sister offered, indeed, to the other such consolation as her philosophy

suggested; but both agreed that Basil's voluntary absence arose from scruples of conscience suggesting the danger of encouraging sentiments of mutual attachment, which could only end in disappointment and remorse.

Such was the position of their affairs, and such the monotonous tenour of their existence—(unconnected with the passing events of the day by even the perusal of a newspaper, unless occasionally at the house of the Neapolitan Consul)—when one morning, as the artist was standing absorbed before a new canvas, on which he was beginning to sketch, with some enthusiasm, the rude outline of a new historical picture, he was roused from his reverie by a slight touch on the shoulder, and found that a stranger was standing behind him:—a man of simple but gentlemanly exterior, who, unobserved by the artist, had been introduced into the room by the servant on the plea of business with her master.

"I have the pleasure, I believe, of addressing Mr. Verelst," said he, "whom I have had more difficulty in tracing out, than ought to have been the case with the painter of such works as those I see around me."

As he spoke, the visitor glanced towards the two pictures from the *Nibelungen Lied*, which still occupied their post of disgrace against the wall; and the poor simple artist who, from the seclusion of his habits of life, was becoming daily less and less a man of the world, felt so puzzled by hearing compliments addressed to himself by a man of such courtly manners, stood gazing in amazement, as if puzzled to determine whether he were not the victim of a mystification.

"I have reason to imagine," resumed the stranger, "that a painting which I bought nearly a year since, of a picture-dealer of the name of Stubbs, (representing the Marriage of Cana,) as the work of Poussin, is in reality a production of your pencil, and though I plead guilty to having been the

dupe of my own ignorance in the purchase, (for after all the detection of the fraud rested with myself,) it grieves me much to believe that, of the price I paid for it (four hundred guineas,) perhaps not a tenth part reached the hands of the admirable artist with whom it originated."

"Not a *twentieth* part!" rejoined Verelst, with a smile. "I remember the picture only too well. I had grounded great expectations upon it; but was forced, by the necessities of my family, to sell it at a moment's notice for a paltry ten-pound note!"

"*Ten pounds!*" reiterated the stranger, shrugging his shoulders. "The rogue—the robber! I had a hard matter to get it from him at less than the five hundred guineas he originally asked me. I have bought many other pictures of him, at high prices, of some of which perhaps you may be able to indicate the true origin, which I am now beginning to suspect as bringing sad discredit upon my connoisseurship. With this

view, Sir, I have been making strenuous efforts to discover your abode. As some inducement to you to accord me the favour of a visit to my collection, I would willingly induce you to bring with you the two noble pictures I see on your hands, if, indeed, the value you set on them be not above my reach."

As he spoke, the courteous customer began to examine with care and interest the pair of pictures, on which the disappointed artist had almost ceased to pride himself, or found expectations of profit.

"I once prized these pictures, as a partial man is too apt to prize his favourite work!" said Verelst, standing beside his visitor to contemplate his neglected pictures.—"I once rated them at a couple of hundred guineas! But I am sick of the sight of them; and should be glad to dispose of them for a quarter of the sum."

"That were a most unjust self-injury,"

observed the stranger—"particularly where the original appraisement was so modest. On the contrary, I shall be most happy to write you a cheque for the full amount. You are, in fact, doubly entitled to it, for I have every expectation of obtaining, through your testimony, restitution of the price of my pretended Poussin."

Verelst began to stammer expressions of surprise and thankfulness; but the visitor interrupted him with a request for a pen and ink.

"If you present this draft at Coutts's," said he, offering to Verelst a printed paper he had taken from his pocket-book, "you will find it honoured; after which, I shall ask you the favour to bring the pictures in person to my house."

Verelst, having glanced, as well as his confusion would permit, at the name subscribed to the bottom of the cheque, saw with pride and exultation that it was that

of the Marquis of ——; a nobleman honoured by the high estimation of artists and men of letters.

"If you can so arrange your engagements," added the Marquis, interrupting his acknowledgments, "you would do me an additional favour by bringing them at twelve o'clock; at which hour, you would find a vacant place at my breakfast table, and meet there the gentleman to whom I am indebted for the discovery of the fraud practised upon me, as well as of your name and address,—an enlightened patron of the arts, doubtless known to you by name—my friend, Mr. Osalez."

A faint cry bursting from the lips of the artist's wife, intimated at that moment, for the first time, to the Marquis, that a third person was present at the interview, and that the easy chair placed beside the open window with its back towards them, contained the emaciated form of Mrs. Verelst,

to whose side her husband now rushed in consternation.

Agitated by a thousand conflicting emotions, on learning the tide of good fortune which would enable her husband to discharge the obligations which had weighed so heavily on the minds of both, to the offending Basil, the poor invalid had been unable to control the revulsion of feeling occasioned by the discovery that they were indebted for this overpowering benefit to the interposition of—A. O.!

CHAPTER VI.

They were all aliens!
Thou wert the adopted of our house.
COLERIDGE'S "*Wallenstein.*"

ON taking possession of his old lodgings on his return from the Tower, the first circumstance communicated to Basil by his landlord,—(the retired butler of a noble family,)—was, that a shabbyish-looking person had called repeatedly with earnest inquiries concerning the moment and manner of his arrival.

"A gentleman?"—inquired Basil, who, being out of debt, had less apprehension of shabby-looking persons calling with inquiries,

than might have been the case with Maitland or Wilberton.

"Why, I should say, Yes, Sir," replied the man, "though there warn't much matters to boast of in the coat on his back.—But he spoke like a person of eddication."

Basil smiled approvingly at the distinction, which did not, however, assist his guesses.—At length, it occurred to him, so strongly as to bring the colour to his face, that the mysterious stranger was most likely the Protean Abednego; a suspicion fully confirmed by the information which his minute inquiries now managed to elicit.

"And he said he would call again?"—demanded young Annesley.

"This evening, Sir,—he said he would be sure to look in this evening."

And the tone of glee in which the young guardsman hastened to give orders that the moment his strange visitor arrived he should be admitted into his sitting-room, relieved the mind of the landlord, (with whom his

first-floor was a first favourite,) from a suspicion that "a small account,"—a name usually given to a very large one, had been the cause of the spontaneous change of colour.

"I shall come home immediately after dinner to meet this gentleman," observed the young guardsman; "but if by chance he should arrive here first, you would oblige me, Mr. Smith, by detaining him till I come."

Thus adjured, Mr. Smith lost no time in converting the shabby-genteel man into a rich uncle of eccentric habits; and, accordingly, when the stranger *really* made his appearance, he was received with all the state and ceremony due to the Ambassador of one of the Great Powers!

Ten minutes only had he been seated, however, in the favourite arm-chair of Basil, beside his shaded reading lamp, when the young man, who had hurried home from the house-dinner of the Club, entered the room.

"*Verelst!*"—cried he, starting at sight of his unexpected guest; "this is indeed a most agreeable surprise!—I was afraid you had dismissed me altogether from your recollection!"

"It is not so easy to dismiss those altogether from our recollection, Mr. Annesley," gravely rejoined the old artist, "towards whom we have heavy obligations."

"If such be your only motive for remembering me," cried Basil, warmly, "God knows I have little desire to occupy a place in your memory. Unless remembered as one, towards whom, in a foreign country, in sickness and neglect, you did the part of a kinsman,—one whom you admitted to sit beside your household fire, one to whom you conceded almost the privileges of a son, one who has never ceased to regard you as a father,—I would fain be utterly forgotten."

Basil flung down his hat impetuously on a chair, while uttering this tender expostulation; to which Verelst replied only by

turning away, as if seeking for some papers he had placed on the table beside him.—But Basil fancied when the old man again addressed him, that there was a kindly moisture in his eye, as though his own words had not been utterly disregarded.

Still, the painter attempted no direct reply to the appeal.

"I am come, Sir," said he, evading the question of such reminiscences, "with a thankful and rejoicing heart, to discharge the obligations you so nobly conferred upon me. It would have been easy to do so by letter, or through the intervention of a third person: but I was unwilling, my dear Mr. Annesley, you should a moment suppose that, because able to return back the exact tale of moneys you generously disbursed on my account, I had become unmindful of the favour, never to be forgotten, which your timely aid bestowed with them on me and mine.—Letters are cold and dry in the expressions of such feelings as now swell within

my bosom. Nor should I have found it easy so to define my own sentiments as to render you sensible with what fervour I and mine recognise the extent of our obligations, without overlooking the cruel manner in which you have attempted to force your way into the painful secrets of a family, which had withheld nothing else from your participation."

"As I live and breathe, my dear Verelst," cried Basil, eagerly, "I have not the most remote suspicion to what you allude: nor did I ever, in your case, or any other, attempt to possess myself unhandsomely of the secrets of other people!"

The artist gravely shook his head; and taking from the pocket-book beside him three notes of one hundred pounds each, placed them in the hand of Basil, who had now seated himself on the opposite side of the table.

"I am glad you bring me these," cried Basil Annesley, laying them carelessly down,

"because it is a proof that you are more prosperous than when I had the happiness of enjoying your society. But what is the return of this money compared with that of your friendship! I fondly trusted, on seeing you under my roof, that you were come to tell me my unknown offence was forgiven;—that you had repented your injustice towards me;—that you were again about to open your arms and heart to one who has no desire on earth so urgent as to find them unclosed to him as of old. I swear to you, dear Sir, that never, from the first moment of our acquaintance, have I cherished a thought or feeling that was not kindness itself towards you!"

"In that case," replied the artist, evidently much moved, and gazing upon the agitated young man with eyes which the tenderness of an almost paternal affection filled with tears,—"in that case, why insult my wife by disclosing to her that you

have discovered her family connexion with one who—but no matter!"

"On my honour as a gentleman," cried Annesley, "I have made no discoveries,—I have intentionally offered no insult. As regards the family connexions of Mrs. Verelst, she may be, for anything I know to the contrary, the daughter of a peer or the daughter of peasant! I never heard,—I never inquired even her name! It was enough for me that I knew her to be everything that is amiable, gentle, and patient in woman,—the kindest of mothers,—the most devoted of wives. In what way the book, which appears to have constituted my ground of offence, could have interested her feelings, I am wholly at a loss to surmise. By a strange fatality, however, the very same volume proved to be of equal importance in the eyes of a person by a singular coincidence of circumstances highly interesting to myself, a Mr. Osalez,—a

man still more widely and more unsatisfactorily known under the name of A. O."

"You have said it!" exclaimed Verelst, almost shuddering.

"What have I said?" inquired the astonished Basil.

"You have named the man by whose vindictive persecutions the heart of my poor wife was broken!"

"Persecutions!" exclaimed Annesley. "Surely, surely you must be mistaken! Chance has brought me somewhat familiarly acquainted with this singular individual; and as far as my observation and experience reach, I have found him the enemy only of his own comfort; generous to others, —to himself alone parsimonious; and even then, wilfully and waywardly, as if in vengeance or atonement!"

"What should you know of him compared with my poor Rachael?" faltered the artist, much agitated by recurrence to the subject evidently so painful. "How

should chance have taught you more of his character and motives than is known to *her?*"

"Pardon me!" replied Basil. "Circumstances which I will hereafter explain to you, make it evident to me that it is Mr. Osalez who, by a liberal expenditure of time, trouble, and money, has been the means of bringing to light those impositions so injurious to your prospects as an artist, which have been recently exposed in the newspapers. It was my intention, had you not visited me to-night, to take an early opportunity of apprising you of the fact."

"I am aware of it," replied Verelst, coldly. "The Marquis of ——, by whose munificent patronage I have been enabled to discharge my obligations towards you, informed me that it was to Mr. Osalez he was indebted for his knowledge of my address. But since acquainted with it,—since himself resident in this country, and aware that my unfortunate family had been

driven hither for refuge, what but the most cruel and revengeful obduracy prevented his offering the crumbs from his table to appease the hunger of his nearest kindred?"

Basil Annesley started from his seat to listen!

"Even if disposed to persist in his animosities against myself," resumed Verelst, "what pretext was there for withholding from his poor sister the aid that might have assuaged the pangs of sickness, and relieved the anxieties of a mother trembling for the destiny of her girls!"

Pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate,—Basil could now only falter, "Sister!—Mrs. Verelst *sister* to the notorious,—the infamous A. O.!"

Verelst appeared surprised in his turn.

"A few minutes ago," remonstrated the artist, "you were advocating his cause!—You even assured me that chance had brought you familiarly acquainted with

circumstances inspiring high respect for his character?"

"I repeat it!"

"Yet you apply to his name such reckless epithets as infamous and notorious!" interrupted the artist.

"Say rather to his *calling!*"—retorted Basil Annesley.

"In commercial England, you have surely little right to despise it!"—observed Verelst, in some amazement.

"Commercial England has her fair and legitimate modes for the disposal of capital," observed Basil, somewhat nettled.

"I had always fancied that Exchange speculators, so long as prosperous, occupied an important position in the moneyed world!" replied Verelst. "Without them, how are the finances of kingdoms to be carried on? The father and grandfather of my wife were the wealthiest merchants in Cadiz. Osalez, excited by the advantages of an English education, entertained higher ambitions.

On the death of his father, he gathered together his enormous capital, and renouncing the hazards of commerce, attempted a career which, but for the accident of his singular personal disappointments, might have sufficed for his happiness. Of that period of his life, it becomes me not to speak; but when enabled, later, to resume his position in society, it was surely insufficient to couple his unblemished name with such epithets as 'notorious' or 'infamous,' that it became one of the most accredited and widely known of those which convulse the Stock Exchanges of the various capitals of Europe?"

"Some of the first financiers and most respected men in the country, have been Stockbrokers," cried Basil. "But a Money-lender,—an advertising Money-lender!"

"How mean you?" cried Verelst, growing pale in his turn.

"The money that now lies so unsatisfactorily before me," observed Basil, "enables

me to inform you without further scruples of delicacy, that I should have been exposed to some personal difficulty by the payment of the bills I accepted in your favour, but for having raised the sum in demand by the assistance of a common usurer,—whom I *then* believed to be a Jew, and knew only by his ill repute in the world,—under the opprobriated name of A. O.!"

"And these inconveniences, this hazard, you incurred so generously for our sake!" cried the artist, seizing his hand, and losing all interest in the disclosure more immediately concerning his family on discovering the real amount of his obligation to Basil. "Fool that I was! How little, how *very* little did I conjecture the truth! I fancied that you were obliging me out of the overflowings of an abundant fortune, and even then, was grateful! But that you should have hazarded for our sake the shame of the spendthrift, the cares of the prodigal! That you should have been forced into con-

tact with the vile and degraded. Ah! Basil!—oh! Mr. Annesley!—this touches me to the quick!"

And reading in the expression of his young friend's countenance a degree of emotion almost equal to his own, Verelst, without further effort to contain his feelings, threw himself upon the shoulder of Annesley, and wept like a child.

"And we presumed to find fault with you!" faltered the artist, raising his head after some moments of absorbing agitation. "We dared to condemn you!—to call you proud, to suspect you of an intention to offend and insult us?"

"You cannot surely have been so unjust!" cried Basil, starting from his embrace. "Surely your wife—your daughters——"

"My wife could place no other interpretation upon your conduct in suddenly placing before her a book, formerly the property of, and bearing the names of her father and brother; by the former of whom she had been

cast off on account of her improvident marriage—by the latter of whom, she was visited with still bitterer perseverance of vengeance."

"I have only to reiterate my assurances that I had not the most remote suspicion of the nature of the inscription or the meaning of the initials," said Annesley; "and that I borrowed the work from my mother's library, with no other object than to afford you entertainment. How it even came there, must be the subject of close, and I fear vexatious, inquiry hereafter. Very little, alas! did I surmise your kinsmanship with a man so disgraced in the eyes of the world as the individual whose initials (as I then supposed by the effect of chance) were inscribed therein."

"And yet," said Verelst, "you assure me that you are aware of the interposition of Osalez in my professional career?"

"Still, believing you to be utter strangers to each other, I fancied he was interesting himself in your behalf, as he would have

done in that of any other man of genius lying under the scourge of evil fortune. But, advantageously as I am prepared to think of Abednego in comparison with those who judge him only as a Jew,—a miser,—an extortioner,—there are revolting mysteries both in his character and circumstances, which I am wholly unable to solve. The more I ponder on all I know of him, the more I become perplexed by that which I am unable to understand. At one moment, I believe him to be one of the greatest,—at another, the meanest of human beings. In him, all extremes appear united—opulence and penury,—generosity and baseness,—enlightenment and ignorance,—liberality and prejudice,—tenderness and brutality! How am I to reconcile all this?"

"But during the intimate intercourse you appear to have held together," demanded the artist, "did Osalez never become aware of your interest in my professional fortunes,—

nor give you to understand the bond of kindred blood uniting him with my wife?"

"Never!—never in the slightest degree!" cried Basil Annesley. "Yet, now I think of it, I remember hearing him refer to your position as an indigent artist; a proof that the misfortunes of his excellent sister must have been fully known to him."

"Till within a few weeks," observed Verelst, "we were utterly ignorant of his social position in this country: and aware of his antipathy, and dreading further persecution at his hands, my wife had not courage to address him with representations of the abject nature of our own.

"It was, thanks to that very picture-dealer whose knavery has been the means of presenting me to the Marquis of ——, (from whom I have already received orders that will keep my easel in full activity for years to come, and at a rate of remuneration exceeding my most enthusiastic anticipations,)

I had grounds for conjecturing that a picture of mine, a design from the 'Notre Dame' of Victor Hugo, had fallen into the hands of the wealthy brother of my wife. Even then, I knew not his abode,—I conceived not his riches and consequence. Nay, I believed him to have fallen considerably from his high estate, till apprised yesterday, by my noble patron, of his prosperity. Little did his lordship imagine when apologising to me at his breakfast-table this morning, for the absence of the enlightened patron of the arts to whom he was indebted for his knowledge of my works, that he was talking to me of a brother!"

"More irreconcilable incongruities!" exclaimed Basil, greatly depressed by his discovery of a connexion which he knew would be more fatal to the interests of his affection, with his mother, than the fact that his beloved Esther was a teacher, and the daughter of an artist, inasmuch as a mere remote allusion to Jewish partialities had

been the cause of driving Lady Annesley to frantic exasperation.

"That very picture of the Esmeralda," resumed the artist, "affords further proof of the contrariety and eccentricity of character of poor Osalez;—nay, but for my certainty of his infirmities of mind, I should be wholly unable to account for such inconsistency. While avoiding or injuring his sister and her family, he was induced, it seems, to give hundreds of pounds for a work of inconsiderable merit, simply because the principal figure is a likeness of his once-loved Rachael!"

"Far more so of her daughter!" added Basil, in a lower voice.

"You knew not my dear wife in her days of youth and beauty!" faltered the artist. "The patient invalid, the smiling drudge, the humble artist's wife, presents but a poor shadow of the worshipped, the lovely, the triumphant Señora Osalez, who could not pass from her father's carriage to

the steps of the church or theatre, but the idlers of Cadiz crowded to feast their eyes on her more than Oriental beauty, endowed as she was with the intelligence and accomplishments of Europe, yet glowing with the riper tints of the sunny South."

"I have seen all this, Sir, in your daughters," again hesitated Basil.

"Esther and Salome are lovely girls, as well as the most duteous of daughters," observed Verelst, with deep feeling; "but neither the one nor the other of them deserves comparison with her mother at the period when she forsook the gorgeous mansion of her father, to become the bride of the enthusiastic German artist, who dedicated to her beauty every impulse of a fervid soul, and had, alas! nought beside to offer to her acceptance.—The Marquis informs me," added Verelst, after a long pause, during which he seemed labouring to overcome the struggle of his feelings,—"that

large as was the price given by Osalez for my Esmeralda, he has offered him double the money to part with it, but in vain.—I cannot help fancying that, in spite of his apparent indifference to his sister's welfare, Abednego was unwilling her portrait should pass into the hands of a stranger."

"That can hardly have been the case," observed Basil, fancying he was about to flatter the self-love of the artist. "On the contrary, it must have been the intrinsic value he discerned in the execution of the picture, that rendered him so tenacious; since it was from his own hands, and as a free gift, that I obtained this copy."

While thus explaining himself, Basil drew forth from his bosom, where, by day and night it was fondly treasured, his enamel copy of the Esmeralda!

"What means this?"—cried the astonished Verelst, regarding at first sight the miniature in no other light than as a por-

trait of his wife. Say, say! what means this?—The likeness of my poor Rachael in your possession?"

The explanations rendered necessary of the emotion of Verelst, aroused Basil Annesley to a sense of his own imprudence.—It was impossible to give a colouring to his singular value for that lovely face, otherwise than startling to the painter.

"And you have been wearing it thus, then,—wearing it next your heart,—wearing it as we treasure only the gift of affection, the pledge of fidelity!" cried Verelst; "and all the while we were accusing you of an intent to mortify us,—of coldness,—of——"

"Spare, spare me these vexatious truths!" cried Basil, eagerly.

"To *you*," resumed Verelst, after having hurriedly examined the beautiful execution of the miniature, (and noticed how singularly it recalled the features of those who were dearest to him, even while realizing one of the brightest creations of the magic

of romance,) "to *you* it doubtless serves to retrace, in combination, both young and old of the grateful family of the artist on whom you have conferred such generous obligations."

Basil Annesley struggled for a moment with his feelings. However afraid of alarming the pride and susceptibility of Verelst, he would not submit to such a misconstruction of his sentiments. He satisfied himself, however, by adding in a subdued voice—"It serves, at least, to recal to me the face which unites in my estimation all that is fairest, holiest, and dearest in human nature."

The simple artist listened with delight, but wholly without enlightenment. — It seemed to *him* the most natural thing in the world, that his old pupil, his generous friend, should love Esther and Salome, and pronounce them dear and holy,—they, whom he had known as children and appreciated in their womanly discharge of filial duty.

But that he should love either of them singly and separately, or one of them more than the other, never occurred to poor Verelst!

"You have received a commission, then, from the Marquis!" inquired Annesley, by way of giving a new turn to the conversation.

"A commission that delights me!" cried the painter, with enthusiasm; "for it will enable me to realize my highest ambitions! I am to paint in fresco the new gallery of his castle in the North;—a series of designs from English history!—For this, by the way, I must read as well as paint."

"But by such an engagement, you will be compelled to remove your whole family from town!" cried Basil, in a tone of consternation, on beholding his newly-erected castles-in-the-air precipitated in a moment to the ground. "Under such circumstances you will stand in need of funds previous to receiving the remuneration due to you; and I earnestly entreat you, as a friend on whom

you have conferred obligations, and who has consequently a claim to priority of service in return, to appropriate the notes you have forced upon me to your own use.—At some future time, when you become rich, (as you now cannot fail to do,) you shall pay the money back to me. I promise you that it will be an act of charity to secure it; for nearly a year will elapse before it becomes due to A. O., from whom I borrowed it on interest; and in the interim, if lying idle in my hands, it might lead me into a thousand scrapes.—It might teach me to become a prodigal,—a gambler,—a coxcomb,—heaven knows what!—Money, you know, my dear Verelst, is the corruptor of all human hearts!"

"An axiom of the truth of which my own experience, Heaven knows, has availed little to persuade me!" said the poor artist, with a bitter smile.—"Your arguments, my dear Mr. Annesley, are kind as they are specious. But my noble patron has rendered your assistance needless. Aware of the difficulties

to be encountered by a poor painter of historical pictures, in such matter-of-fact days as the present, he has generously presented me with a couple of hundred pounds in advance. I am rich, my dear young friend,—rich,—rich,—I was about to say rich as a Jew—but that the word is in utter distaste in my family! Trust me, I am fully enabled to remove them all to the North in ease and comfort."

"But surely," cried Basil, horror-struck at such a prospect—"surely so long a journey, with such uncertain prospects at the close, will be disadvantageous to poor Mrs. Verelst, whose infirm state appears to demand the utmost care and consideration?"

"Rachael would suffer twenty times as much, my dear Sir, by separation from her husband.—As to accommodations, the Marquis has assigned to our use a suite of apartments in the castle."

Here was a new source of anxiety for Basil!—Esther,—his own Esther, exposed

to the injurious admiration which her beauty must necessarily call forth in such a house!

"Nevertheless," said he, attempting a new line of argument, "such an interruption to the engagements of the Miss Verelsts——"

"Engagements!"—interrupted the proud father, with enthusiasm—"you surely do not suppose that, now I am able to earn bread for them, I will allow them to waste their precious talents in teaching idiotic children or languid misses?—No, no, no!—No more engagements for my girls!—It is one of my chief sources of joy and triumph on this occasion, that henceforward those dear children may live for the enjoyment of life,—for the embellishment of life,—for the delight of others, as ever, ever, of their fond and happy parents!—No, no!—No more engagements for Salome and Esther Verelst."

Basil was inexpressibly touched by the utter forgetfulness of self manifest in all the calculations of the good old man.

"Yet surely," said he, unwilling to abandon all hope of their future society,—"surely such utter seclusion as will await the young ladies at the castle——"

"They will not *both* bear us company," replied Verelst, calmly,—little suspecting the pain he was about to inflict.—"Salome is to go down with her mother; but, at present, Esther will remain on a visit to Madame Branzini. All was settled this morning. The Duke di San Catalda would not hear of her quitting London just now; and after some contestation, I acceded to their united request."

Basil Annesley had not strength or courage to give utterance to the question that rose to his lips—"They are engaged, then,—positively engaged?"

He could only stagger to a seat, and press his hand to his heart with the consciousness that its warm impulses of hope and affection were crushed for ever.

Shocked by his sudden change of coun-

tenance, Verelst was starting forward with inquiries into the nature of his seizure, when at that moment the door opened; and, unannounced and unaccompanied, there appeared on the threshold the striking figure of A. O.!

CHAPTER VII.

Oh! this yellow plague,
That crusts our hearts with foul and festering sores.
VANE.

IT was now the turn of Verelst to change countenance; and a succession of strong emotions were rapidly portrayed on the open physiognomy of the painter, incapable of artifice or disguise. Surprise, vexation, satisfaction, perplexity, obtained by turns the mastery. There were tears in his large grey eyes;—there was determination in the lines surrounding the firmer and more expressive mouth.

His brother-in-law, on the other hand, betrayed not the slightest touch of feeling.

Master of himself, hardened to habits of dissimulation, whatever emotions might be swelling in his heart, the countenance of Abednego was undisturbed. Though apprised that Basil was engaged with Verelst, he had still sought the interview. Nay, it soon became apparent that his visit was produced by the expectation of finding his brother-in-law with his young friend.

On recovering from the shock occasioned by his sudden entrance, Verelst, while Osalez gave his hand to young Annesley, (who, depressed and desperate, was scarcely sensible to his mode of salutation,) had snatched his hat and was preparing to quit the room. —But the unwelcome guest interposed ere he could reach the door.

"Hear me before you go!" said Osalez, in a firm voice. "I came hither for the express purpose of meeting you. The presence of a mutual friend was a fitter spot for our interview, than that of a cold stranger, like the Marquis. It was not disin-

clination that kept me away from his house this morning."

It was now the turn of Verelst to exhibit composure!

"Had I been aware of your intentions," said he, coldly, "I would certainly have deferred my visit to Mr. Annesley till a future moment."

"You *could* not!" was the cool reply of Osalez. "It would have been impossible for you to sleep this night, with a sum of money in your possession which you knew to be the property of yonder boy.—I know ye both!—The same hot-headed enthusiasm that prompted *him* to pledge his name, his peace of mind, his narrow income, to a Money-lender, to obtain the means of obliging you, would render it impossible to you to close your eyes, while unnecessarily remaining his debtor."

"I have, I find, to thank you for the means of repaying him," observed Verelst,

somewhat softened—"For *that* favour, accept my acknowledgments. But it does not, it cannot efface from my recollection your long neglect and unkindness towards the most deserving of women. Farewell! —Against you we cherish no resentment; but there can be neither love nor amity between thine and mine."

"Thine *are* mine!" replied Abednego, neither abashed nor dismayed by these bitter reproaches. "Resist as we may the dictates of nature, the ocean can no more dissever from its waves an offending drop, than your wife and children expel from their veins the blood that is kindred with my own."

"Neither are we the first of those so conjoined by nature," interrupted Verelst, "who have converted kindred blood to drops of gall!—Again I say, therefore, accept my thanks and my farewell. Between persons so closely united, it must be peace or war.

With others there might exist a medium of lukewarm good-will,—with us there must be love or hatred!"

"I want no medium," said Osalez, still preventing his departure, and with such steadiness, that Basil Annesley, deeply interested in the discussion, was driven to despair by the sturdy perseverance of Verelst. "There must be love between us,—there must be peace!—Never too late for peace. Your friend here will tell you," he continued, glancing towards Basil, "that I have recently wrestled, face to face, with Death. At such a moment the truths to which, in health and amid the contentions and struggles of life, we close our ears and eyes, speak trumpet-tongued to the Soul, and reveal their dread decree in characters as legible as those manifested in warning to Belshazzar. I have sinned against you, Verelst—I have suffered vindictive feelings and resentment of a single injury, to efface from my bosom those hallowed ties of affec-

tion vouchsafed by the Almighty for the solace and consecration of human life. I have allowed your officious interposition in my affairs to steel my heart against the sufferings of a once-loved sister and the children she has borne to you. In this I have greatly offended, and I therefore seek you, in all Christian humility, to acknowledge my fault and entreat the favour of your forgiveness."

Utterly thrown off his guard by this singular self-abasement on the part of the haughty and obdurate Abednego, Verelst was so far softened as to hesitate.

But a moment's consideration brought before him anew the years of suffering and privation endured by his excellent wife and lovely children; and again, he hardened his heart, and put forth no answering token to the extended hand of Osalez.

"You have my full forgiveness," said he, —"Friendship is not a thing to start into life spontaneously, on the slight demand of

a converted enemy. The wrongs of my family forbid me to say more:—the sense of what is due to your tardy repentance, to concede less."

Once more the agitated artist made a movement to depart. But Basil Annesley now interposed.

"My dear Verelst!" cried he—"it is you who are now exhibiting a vindictive spirit. How—how can you allow yourself to torture a nature so beneficent, so cordial as your own,—in order to assume feelings of animosity, which, even if they existed, should be disarmed by the frank and fervent manner in which the olive-branch is extended towards you!"

"If you only knew, my dear young friend,"—cried the painter,—"what a series——"

"I know, and seek to know, nothing on the subject of your quarrel!" hastily interrupted Basil. "But *this* I know,—that half the quarrels and half the resentments

of this world, arise from misunderstandings, which a few reasonable words would suffice to clear up."

"In this case all is perfectly understood," replied the artist, coldly;—"nor are we children to obey the impulses of momentary passion. Both have brooded upon our wrongs, till mutual hatred has been engendered."

"If engendered,—on one side, it has been bitterly atoned,—on the other, bitterly repented," rejoined Osalez, with tears in his eyes.

"My dear Verelst!" cried Basil Annesley, deeply moved by witnessing such profound emotion on the part of men of advanced years,—"half an hour ago you were pleased to express towards me feelings of gratitude and regard. If I have ever served you, and you wish to mark your sense of obligation, I beseech you do it at once, and efface all trace for ever—by accepting the hand which I see trembling with eagerness to

enclasp your own!" At this appeal, Verelst, for the first time, turned his eyes full upon his brother-in-law: and either the traces of time and care perceptible in his broken frame and withered countenance, or the manifestation of emotions which Abednego was at no pains to conceal, softened the obduracy of the indignant husband; for, on finding the hand of Osalez placed in his, a moment afterwards, by Basil Annesley, he no longer persisted in rejection. In a moment, both gave a loose to the long-resisted promptings of nature; and the "iron tears of Pluto's cheek" were emulated in those that fell profusely from beneath the shaggy eyebrows of A. O.

Basil was about to retire to the adjoining room, leaving the two brothers to a more copious mutual explanation. But Osalez prevented him. "Nay," said he—"you are as if of our own flesh. Tarry and hear all! —I have no secrets—I wish to have none from you."

Amid all his struggles of feeling, Basil could scarcely refrain from a smile!—To hear A. O. boasting of having no secrets from him!—A. O., whose whole life was a mystery—whose right hand knew not the doings of the left!—A. O., who concentrated in his own person half-a-dozen separate existences, and unaccordant fortunes!

"I would fain have taken steps towards this reconciliation many months ago—from the moment of my first acquaintance with this improvident boy, your friend Annesley," resumed Osalez, when at length confidentially seated beside Verelst on the sofa, (having resumed his own self-possession long before the simple artist had ceased to sob like a child,)—"but that I did not choose to approach as a benefactor the man I wished to conciliate as a brother. I wished you to be independent in circumstances,—rich through your own talents and endowments,—before I addressed myself to you with overtures of good-will, of

which the necessities of your family might seem to compel your acceptance. We have now met upon equal ground; and you have granted me your forgiveness, as a Christian and a kinsman, without forfeiting your self-respect. All is as it should be!—I have taken every precaution to spare your pride as well as promote my own interest in your affection. And now, tell me—when will you propose a visit from me to my sister? In her infirm condition, we must beware of producing agitation, more especially on the eve of a long journey,—if, indeed, after our mutual explanations, you persist in fulfilling your engagements to the Marquis."

"I will speak to Rachael this very night," replied Verelst, but calmly and cautiously. "It will require time to prepare her for so trying an interview. Years of hardship,—the loss of several children, which she attributes to the same cause,—and positive ailments arising from those united causes, have so altered my poor wife, that the

greatest precaution is indispensable. She is so changed that you will not know her."

"I have been many times in her presence within these last few months," said Osalez, with a smile.

"You are mistaken,—quite mistaken!" eagerly rejoined the artist. "She never quits the house. Ask Mr. Annesley!—She never leaves even her own room!"

"It was *there* our interview took place," calmly rejoined Abednego.

"Mistaken,—mistaken!" persisted Verelst, with a smile,—gently shaking his head. "I promise you that you would not know poor Rachael were you to meet."

"She is far less changed, however, than myself," replied Osalez; "since, when we *did* meet, I recognised her perfectly; while *she* addressed me as a stranger. Do you remember the person who fetched from your rooms the two battle-pieces sold by the scoundrel Stubbs to the Duke of Rochester?"

Verelst paused a moment, for consideration.

"Perfectly," said he, at length. "But *that* was an old Jew!"

"It was myself!"

The artist replied by an incredulous smile.

"Do you recollect that, when you received the three five-pound notes for which you had sold the pictures, or rather, in consideration of which you had been robbed of them by the knavish dealer—you bade him inform Mr. Stubbs that the original design of the Battle of the Standard was still in your hands, having withdrawn it from your series of military sketches, as the groundwork of the picture in question, and produced at the suggestion of a dear friend?"

"Which *dear* friend was, I trust, myself," gaily interrupted Basil.

"But *you* were not,—you *cannot* have been that filthy old Jew!" cried the artist, in utter amazement.

"You have seen me more than once in disguises equally unseemly," replied Osalez, undisturbed.—"For years past I have placed a great gulf betwixt myself and what is called the world; and when once we hazard so bold a step as to fling off the bond of fellowship with our brethren, we require the creation of prodigious interests, and excitements indeed strong, to fill up the vacuum. I have long been at war with mankind,—as long as they were previously my enemies.—Out of my sixty years, for thirty did I support their injustice; and, during the last thirty, I have revenged myself. But he who fights single-handed against society, must multiply the guises under which he wields his weapons; and shrink from no means or measures by which he can strengthen his cause. For such explanations, however, we shall find a time hereafter. Enough that you promise me to prepare my poor dear sister to receive me. Basil Annesley will apprise me of your success;—or, better

still, conduct you to my abode. The way to yours I learnt from *him;*—few people, I suspect, are better acquainted with it."

The young soldier coloured deeply at this hazardous allusion.

"I was not aware," said he, "of having mentioned to you the address of Mr. Verelst."

"It was from your pictures, which I found in the hands of Stubbs and others," replied Abednego, addressing Verelst, rather than replying to his host, "that I became aware of your being a resident in this country. But you may imagine with what care and cunning these knaves guarded the scent, so long as you remained a dupe in their avaricious hands."

"And it was my good friend Mr. Annesley, then, who did me this further service," exclaimed the painter, warmly.

"Indirectly.—I was anxious to know the object of a certain levy of money which he effected through my means; and since, whe-

ther as Osalez the Crœsus, or as A. O. the Money-lender, (who created Osalez the Crœsus,) I have the means of investigating and comparing all the secrets of the two money markets, (the great and the small,) I had no difficulty in discovering that the acceptances he had to meet were in favour of one Gerard Verelst, a painter living near South Audley-street. The rest was readily ascertained—the miniature I presented to him affords sufficient proof how soon and how thoroughly I made myself master of the secrets of the family."

Basil Annesley gasped for breath. There was no guessing where the indiscreet revelations of Abednego might stop.

"And now," said he, regardless of the embarrassment he had created, "I must wish you good night. Though I have found time to say much that may have appeared to one or both of you superfluous, I am in the greatest haste and some anxiety. I have business to transact before midnight that

dearly concerns the happiness of a family whose ruin,—whatever I may do to avert the fatal crash,—will, ere long, produce nearly as much sensation in the Bedlam called the *beau monde*, as that of the Duke of Rochester. I should leave these Maitlands, in fact, to the consequences of their folly, but that one of the girls has managed to soften my old heart by the eager interest she takes in the fortunes of a certain brother-officer of her brother, named Basil Annesley."

"Is all up, then, with Lord Maitland?" demanded Basil, in a tone of regret, without noticing his allusion.

"His bills have been hawking about the town this year past," replied A. O., with one of his former sarcastic smiles. "Her ladyship is at Almack's, while her signature is in the hands of the Jews."

After a few more bitter allusions to the improvidence of the family, he was gone;—nor did Basil much regret that Verelst, in

his eagerness to communicate to his family the singular reconciliation which had taken place, instantly followed. When the artist had taken his departure, his young friend picked up from the floor the three hundred-pound notes which, amid the varied interests of the foregoing conversation, had fallen unnoticed to the ground.

"Would any one imagine," said he, with a mournful smile, as he placed them in his desk,—"how short a time has elapsed since the possession of these notes appeared to be a matter of life and death!—And would not any one believe that, instead of the beggarly fellow that I am, I had the wealth of the Indies, or of Abednego Osalez, at my command!—But, alas! what further care have I for money? Verelst is now prosperous—Esther lost to me for ever! As to my poor mother, though straitened in means, her pride is so much greater than her poverty, that I am convinced she prefers dispensing with the luxuries of life, to being indebted

for them to any mortal living,—even to her son!"

By degrees, as he began to recover the cruel shock arising from the discovery that the object of his affections was nearly akin to the infamous A. O. and affianced to another, Basil was forced to admit to himself, that the former circumstance was of a nature to reconcile him to the latter!

Never would his haughty mother have consented to his pledging his faith to the niece of the Money-lender! Abednego, if not a Jew, could not be many generations removed from Hebraism; and Basil was only too painfully aware of her rooted antipathy to anything even remotely connected with the Jewish nation.

As this aversion now recurred with redoubled energy to his mind, he also recalled with surprise the half-forgotten fact of her being in possession of a book of a peculiar nature, which Verelst stated to have been the property of his wife's father and brother.

By what possible concatenation of events was this to be accounted for? Once more, he was compelled to ask himself, through what fortuitous chain of incidents the daughter of Lord L——, and widow of Sir Bernard Annesley, could have been brought into connexion with the family of A. O?

Summer was at hand; and he resolved to make the inviting nature of the weather a pretext for a short visit to Barlingham.—The discussions which had already arisen between him and Lady Annesley would afford ground for such interrogations as could not fail to throw light upon the mystery. It was time that all relating to Abednego Osalez should be cleared up! He would no longer be silenced like a child. He was resolved to confront the utmost indignation and harshness on the part of the rigid recluse, rather than remain a martyr to the mysteries by which he now felt himself to be encompassed. The more he had achieved towards fathoming their darkness,

the more he seemed involved in new perplexities!

It was, however, an inexpressible comfort to Basil, that his confidence in his old friend was in process of restoration. To find him openly avowing his disguises, and glorying in his eccentricity, was far more satisfactory than to fancy him the confederate of knaves and impostors; and even the certainty of his obdurate estrangement from a sister so worthy as Mrs. Verelst, was nothing in comparison with the pain of supposing him in league with Stubbs the picture-dealer, in a double imposition upon the Duke of Rochester and the unfortunate Verelst.

The first person who accosted Basil Annesley on the following day, as he was about to enter his Club, was John Maitland; who, instead of the nod that usually passed between them, surprised him by a sudden and fervent grasp of the hand.

"Come a little way down St. James's-street with me, Nan," said he, hooking his

arm into that of Basil, and proceeding with him leisurely, towards Brookes's.—"You are a good fellow," he resumed, as soon as they were out of hearing of Wilberton, and one or two others who were clustered round the door.—"Believe me, I feel the full force of our obligations!"

"*What* obligations?" demanded the astonished Basil.

"Oh! you need not affect ignorance. No occasion to be afraid now of my pleasantries on the subject of A. O. I am as fully aware as you can desire that *such* 'a friend in need is a friend indeed.' Yesterday afternoon, my dear fellow, my prognostications were fulfilled. There was an execution in our house.—A pleasant thing, eh? for her ladyship and the girls, to see bailiffs sitting in the hall!" he continued, with a swelling bosom. "However, it is partly their own fault, if that be any comfort! All the blame was not on my father's side, though they choose to place it there!"

"I am heartily sorry—sincerely sorry," Basil was beginning.

"Come, come!—don't talk so like the Dowager-Colonel!" cried John Maitland—"Carr was heartily sorry—sincerely sorry!—but, hang it — you were better than sorry!"

"What was I, then?" inquired Basil, shrugging his shoulders at the levity of his friend,—"for, upon my soul, I have not the least idea!"

"Of course not,—because *you*, forsooth, have not the slightest acquaintance with A. O.! It was not *you* who interceded in behalf of my family! It was not your liking for Lucy, (who, by the way, is half out of her wits with thankfulness,) which induced you to determine the man whom you will not own as friend or acquaintance, but over whom you have all the influence of a master over a slave, or a Czar of Muscovy over a Colonel of Hussars, to come forward once more to my father's

relief—discharge the writ—and, (on condition of his letting the house in Arlington-street, and retiring to Maitland Park,) re-establish the family affairs?—Oh no!—It was not by any means *you* who did us this excellent service!"

"As I live and breathe—*no!*" cried Basil Annesley, with such earnestness as to cause his companion to stop short for a moment. "Had I the power, indeed, I would have done as much, or twice as much for a friend.—But I have not a guinea in the world!"

"My dear Nan, it is too late to recommence with this flummery!" cried Maitland, almost angry at his seeming mistrust.—"This man, (I beg his pardon, this gentleman,—for a gentleman, God knows, he has shown himself to *us!*) owned to me, in so many words, that he was acting at your instigation; or, more correctly speaking, with a view of affording you pleasure."

"He *has* afforded me sincere pleasure by

his liberality," rejoined Basil. "But he must have divined my wishes by preternatural means, for I swear I never expressed them; nor, on my word of honour as a gentleman, have I any claims upon him that could justify my attempting to influence his conduct in the smallest particular."

John Maitland replied by another incredulous smile. But they had now returned to the club door.

"Not a word of all this before the others!" was the parting injunction of John Maitland; a warning altogether superfluous,—for nothing would have induced Basil to advert, in presence of his brother officers, to any subject even remotely involving mention of a name so suspicious as that of A. O.

Before night, Basil had managed to obtain a week's leave of absence, with the view of accomplishing his visit to Barlingham; and despatched a letter to his mother entreating her sanction to his journey.

The delay occasioned by waiting for her reply would, however, necessarily detain him two days in town; a circumstance he would gladly have avoided,—dreading that the renewal of his intimacy with the artist's family, and their reconcilement with Abednego, might throw him once more into their society, and compel him to become a witness of the mutual affection and happiness of the Duke di San Catalda and Esther Verelst!

On the morrow, however, he was to be on guard, which, for four-and-twenty hours at least, would secure him from contact with any member of the family.

The weather was now as fine as London weather ever pretends to be;—for even the height of summer is scarcely so enjoyable in the metropolis as those delicious days of opening May, before the young leaves have found out into what a world of soot and smoke they have budded, but bear their verdure in purity and freshness, like the

bright and unsullied countenance of a sinless child. The skies were blue,—the leaves green,—the sparrows chirping gaily in park and square, as if making the most of their time, ere London was covered once more with dust and ashes,—her leaves seared and shrivelled,—her atmosphere obscured. At such a season, it is difficult for the buoyant heart of two-and-twenty to sink under the pressure of care!

At the instigation of its own pulses, it hopes when hope there is none,—it loves, when prospect of happiness there is none! The spring-tide of life dances wildly and irresistibly within its bosom. No!—despair is indeed difficult for the young.

Basil usually disliked being on guard; from the mere restraint of being tied to time and place; getting up earlier than usual, and being restricted for the day to such pastimes as a lounge in the British Gallery. Unaffected and unpretending, he had no taste for parading himself and his

uniform in St. James's-street, an appetite that rarely extends beyond the first fortnight of escape from cubhood to clubhood; during which, a young guardsman is privileged to astonish the waiting-women at Grange's with the splendour of his scarlet and gold.

But, on the day in question, howbeit the evening before he had congratulated himself on the certainty thus afforded of escape from the visits of Osalez or Verelst, no sooner was he established at St. James's, than he became insupportably irritated by his enthralment. He discovered that it was essential to go and pay a visit of ceremony to the Branzinis, before Esther was installed in their household. He found out that, in the family distresses of the Maitlands, he should be inexcusable if he failed in the respect of leaving a card at their door. In point of fact, he wanted only to be free. In the restlessness of his discontent he fumed and fretted to be master of

his own actions. Had he not been on guard, Basil would probably have ridden off into the country;—devised business at Richmond, or sulked to his solitary white-bait at the Crown and Sceptre;—and when there—have suddenly become equally fidgety to return to London.

He was, in fact, burning with desire to know all that was passing under the roof of the artist. For the first time, the brother officers on guard with him found him absent and unsociable. Colonel Loftus, (John Maitland being absent,) had ventured to banter him upon his flirtation with Lucy; and the pain which her manifest partiality was supposed to cause to their friend Blencowe. But the fractiousness of Basil's replies soon convinced them that he was in no mood to be trifled with. They saw that he was thoroughly out of temper; nor was it till they had watched him fling away two or three successive cigars as they all stood

smoking together on the steps after dinner, that they attributed his captious fastidiousness to the right cause;—the irritation of a man crossed in love, and whom everything and everybody else consequently crosses;—for if the course of true love never runs smooth, it assuredly seldom fails to render us equally stumbling-blocks in the paths of other people.

The first thing intimated to Basil on reaching his lodgings after coming off guard the following morning, was, that Mr. Osalez had called upon him once or twice in the course of the preceding day, manifesting great anxiety to see him.

"And why did you not tell him I was on guard?" demanded young Annesley; to whom it appeared as easy a matter to pay a visit at St. James's, as at his private residence.

"I did, Sir; but the gentleman seemed put out, and muttered something about 'puppies' and 'coxcombs,' which made me

think it unlikely he would drive further," replied the prim Mr. Smith.

"He was in his carriage, then?" inquired Basil.

"He was, Sir."

"And alone?"

"No, Sir. There was another old gentleman with him, whom I could not rightly see. But both of them seemed much disappointed at not finding you."

After receiving this intelligence, Basil, while dressing and breakfasting, resolved to proceed immediately to the house of Osalez. Something regarding the interests of Verelst might be in agitation, in which his assistance was needful. But to which among the many residences of his Protean friend was he now to address himself?

"As he called in his carriage," mused the young guardsman, "he came, I conclude, in the character of Osalez the financier; and I will therefore hasten to Bernard-street."

Having mounted his hack, he proceeded thither in haste; but at the door received, from the now obsequious butler, who delighted to honour all whom his master delighted to receive at his dinner-table, the information that might have been anticipated—"Mr. Osalez had been off to the city these two hours."

"And where am I to find him in the city?" demanded young Annesley; a query that appeared to excite as much amazement in the rotund pantler, as though he had demanded in what quarter of the town he was to look for Westminster Abbey.

"Mr. Osalez, Sir, will be on the Stock Exchange," said he, conceiving that the handsome young gentleman, differing so widely from the usual visitants of that house, must be infirm of intellect.—"If off 'Change, you will find him at his house of business."

"And where is *that?*"—incautiously inquired Basil.

The man seemed to draw largely upon

the decorum of his calling, in order to refrain from a laugh.

"In the Old Jewry, Sir.—But you need only mention the name of Mr. Osalez in the city, Sir, for any one to shew you the way. The first cabman or orange-boy you meet will inform you."

To the city Basil now hurried; and his park hack was probably as much amazed as his master, to find himself wedged between wagons full of puncheons of sugar or bales of dry goods, the gigantic size of which accounted equally for the power of the splendid draught horses and extent of the teams in use, which appeared to belong to a world of more colossal dimensions. The stunning rumble of Cheapside, the perpetual motion involving so much of the *utile* and so little of the *dulce* of life, served to excite his wonder how the less practical part of business, the portion requiring the aid of figures and calculations, could ever be carried on in the midst of such a hubbub!

On turning, however, into the narrow lane suggested to him, at his first inquiry, as containing the house of business of Osalez and Co., he perceived that even the city has its "quiet situations," its "no thoroughfares,"—like the aristocratic Park Places, and St. James's Places, adjoining the parks of the West End.

The narrow, dirty, dingy lane was apparently occupied by the warehouses of wholesale trade: for just as every house of mark in St. James's had formerly its iron extinguisher beside the door, to put out the flambeaux of the footmen, every doorway had, in token of distinction, its ponderous iron crane, while the lower windows of the houses were closely boarded. On every door-post was inscribed one or more names, as unaristocratic as "Jacob Grimms and nephew," "Fiskin, brothers," "Dando and Company," without further indication of their calling, names constituting the unostentatious thews and sinews of commercial

life;—and though little or no traffic was going on, at that hour, in the street, it is probable that a larger amount of capital passed through every one of those shabby doorways, in the course of a week, than into any mansion in St. James's-square in the period of a year!

Half-way down the lane, however, was an opening into a small court, which, by calculation, appeared to contain the number indicated to Basil; and having accordingly dismounted and given his horse in charge to a steady-looking old man, who put himself forward for the charge, Basil proceeded through the gorge of a narrow court into a larger one, surrounded by high buildings; one side of which seemed occupied by a handsome old-fashioned dwelling-house, and the other by a range of buildings, the basement story of which was appropriated to counting-houses. Of this portion of the mansion, the huge swing-doors seemed in continual vibration to admit or emit a perpetual string of human

beings; — the sort of careworn, sallow-cheeked people, who walk with their coats closely buttoned over their pockets, and their blank visages indicating a mind wandering at many miles' distance;—whom one recognises at first sight as the children of the tribe of Mammon.

Unnoticed, — for such people proceed straight to their place of rendezvous, without a vacant thought to bestow on auguries of the flight of crows or sight of strange faces, —Basil pushed his way through the swing-doors among the rest; and, after passing a second swing-door, found himself in a vast, sky-lighted chamber, containing, by way of furniture, a large time-piece against the wall, three long ranges of wooden-counters, forty wooden stools, and forty wooden clerks sitting calculating thereupon; each with his parchment-bound ledger before him,—each with the multiplication-table engraved on his soul in characters effacing even those of the tables of the law.

In the centre of the hall, was a single mahogany desk and stool, somewhat loftier than the rest, apparently destined to the use of the high-priest of the temple of Mammon. But it was vacant. Clerks were bustling backwards and forwards, with cheque-books, or pocket-books, or printed papers in their hands; apparently as mechanical in operations involving the disposal of millions, as the time-piece against the wall in admeasurement of the still more valuable currency assigned to its computation.

A buzz of whispers, never rising into unbusiness-like tumult, seemed to form a portion of the heated and unsavoury atmosphere of the place;—the money shovelled backwards and forwards across the grated pay-counter, being of no more account in the eyes of the individuals occupied in promoting its circulation, than barley-sugar in those of the confectioner's boy to whom prohibition has ceased to be irksome.

As usual, when in chase of his extraordinary friend, Basil Annesley found himself among a race of persons with whom he had neither an emotion nor an impulse in common; and after being pushed against, and shuffled aside for a minute or two, by individuals having business to transact, and as careless in their outward man as is usually the case with those who have anything to do in the world,—he inquired for Mr. Osalez.

The clerk to whom he applied, pointed to the vacant chair, as much as to say, "Can't you use your eyes, and perceive that he is absent?" when Basil, perceiving that his informant was young and beardless, a stripling like himself, moved a few steps towards the swing-doors, and again addressed the inquiry to a grave-looking, middle-aged man, with a bald head, seedy coat, and mourning ring on his little finger;—who was wasting his time in mending his pen, and had the appearance, among his brother clerks, of a heavy coach running against the mails.

On finding himself civilly accosted by a well-dressed stranger, the elderly clerk slipped from beneath the counter, and desiring Basil to follow him, led the way to the extremity of the hall, towards a room divided from it only by a glazed compartment, shaded with green curtains; but containing only another desk with an old silver standish and writing implements, and half-a-dozen horse-hair chairs.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," apologized the dull old clerk, "I fancied Mr. Osalez must be here! He must have just stepped out. He will be back at two. He is always here as the clock strikes two. Perhaps you will return? or at least favour me by writing your name for him?"

Basil declined doing either. He felt that he had committed a blunder in following Osalez. He found himself as little at home in that vast establishment, as at the bottom of a gold mine. The place was as little adapted to the confidences he was ex-

pecting as the little noisy chamber containing the clock-works of St. Paul's!

Angry with himself and the clerk for the time he had wasted, he muttered something about calling again; and bustled his way back again through the hall, when his transit was as little noted as that of one of the motes dancing in the slanting sunbeams straggling through the skylight, as if in search of some living being on which to confer enjoyment, from the paved open space adjoining the old mansion-house, and ruralized by the name of garden, because containing a pump, and an old sycamore, with about as much sap in the trunk as there exists in the copper-tree forming part of the Chatsworth *jets d'eau*.

Having reached once more the narrow opening of the court into the street, Basil was about to remount his horse, the rein of which was offered him with one hand by the old man, while holding out the other for the expected remuneration; when, as he

was groping in his pocket for a sixpence, instead of the shilling he would probably have given had his visit been less infructuous, the man whispered in a tone of mysterious confidence. "Vy for you sheek him here, ma tear?" and lo, after a start of surprise, young Annesley recognised in the decent-looking individual by whom he was addressed, the fellow who, both in Delahay-street and at Rochester House, had already marked his respectful recognition of the protégé of A. O.

"And *where* should I seek Mr. Osalez, unless at his house of business?" demanded Basil, angrily.

"He hash more houshesh of bushinesh than van, two, or dree," replied the familiar of Abednego's inquisition.

"Take me to the one where I am most likely to find him, then,—and it shall be worth your while," observed Basil Annesley.

The old man, who had been stooping in

scornful examination of the minute coin bestowed on him by Annesley, now peered up into his face with a cunning glance, that not even the disappearance of his rusty beard could disguise from being that of the old Jew; and with only a familiar nod of the head by way of signal of acquiescence and intelligence, he now took the head of Basil's horse and preceded him through a tortuous complexity of dirty lanes, in which the stagnant atmosphere seemed imprisoned as in the cell of a felon!

At the close of a ten-minutes' walk, he paused in a small shabby street, which, from the unequal form of the buildings, seemed to constitute the rear or outlet of one of greater magnitude, and taking a key from his pocket, opened a mean-looking green door, to which neither knocker nor bell-handle was attached; then, stepping back stealthily to Basil, resumed the rein of his horse.

"Do you suppose that I am going to run my head into an earth so uninviting as *that?*" cried young Annesley, warmly. "How do I know into what sort of a den of thieves you may be decoying me?"

"Tievsh if ye shoose!" said the Jew, no whit offended. "But the pashage before you, ma tear, leadsh shtraight where you would find A. O.—*Datsh* all!"

Reassured by his previous knowledge of the old fellow's connexion with Abednego, Basil determined to dare the adventure! Single-handed, he knew himself to be a match for most men! and his strange conductor would scarcely venture to allure into any dangerous resort an officer of the guards, for whom active search would be made in case of disappearance, and who would easily be traced, through the house of business of Osalez, to the suspicious spot. Nevertheless, the entrance to the narrow

passage was grim and repellent enough to daunt a bolder adventurer.

Once across the threshold, he was rather excited than otherwise, by the mysterious aspect of the spot. But scarcely had he groped a few steps along the dark stone corridor, when the door was clapped to behind him; and he found himself alone in the stone passage, which received light only through small gratings inserted in the doors at either end, as if for the purpose of ventilation.

Since it was as easy to attempt further progress, as to return, Basil pushed his way forwards; and on approaching the door at the end, perceived that near it, the passage widened, so as to form a recess containing a wooden bench; while through the grating, which was on an exact level with his face, voices in eager disputation reached him from within. One of them, at least, was familiar to him. One of

them was that of A. O.! The other was a woman's!

On applying his hand to find a latch or opening, he found to his surprise that what he had conceived to be a door, was simply a portion of the passage,—the wooden bench being continued across; and after a moment's reflection, the nature of the apartment within, and of the conversation which he could not forbear overhearing, convinced him that he was simply installed in some hiding-place or observatory,—some Dionysius's ear,—from which the Money-lender was in the habit of exercising his unholy inquisition over his victims previous to a closer encounter!

To interrupt such a conversation as was passing in the chamber beyond, with the admission of having been an eavesdropper, would convey mortification to one party, vexation to the other; and Basil felt consequently privileged to abide the result of the interview.

The fragment of discourse that now reached his ears, however it might disgust, afforded him no new insight into the character or conduct of the lady upon whom he was thus forced to play the spy,—being no other than the young Countess of Winterfield.

All he had formerly heard to her disadvantage from Abednego, naturally recurred to his mind; and he was consequently less surprised at the tone of harshness and air of contempt openly assumed towards her by the Money-lender.

For it was no longer the well-dressed, well-mannered Osalez who stood before him. There was nothing to recal the distinguished financier,—the enlightened patron of the Arts! It was the hard, cautious calculating old usurer of Soho who occupied a plain arm-chair; opposite to the sofa whereon, arrayed in all the elegance of fashion, alternately smiling and weeping,—exercising her coquetry as a beauty, and

her pathos as a petitioner,—sat the unhappy woman, who evidently trusted to the effect of her mingled charms and eloquence, to soften the obdurate heart of—A. O.!

END OF VOL. II.

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